PIRJO KOIVUVAARA

Hunger, Consumption, and Identity in Elizabeth Gaskell's Novels

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
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Distribution
Bookshop TAJU
P.O. Box 617
33014 University of Tampere
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Tel. +358 40 190 9800
Fax +358 3 3551 7685
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This is dedicated to my goddaughter Iiris. She too loves books and food.

Finnish Summary

Tutkin väitöskirjatyössäni nälän ja syömisen suhdetta identiteetin rakentumiseen ja rakentamiseen sekä sen määrittelemiseen englantilaisen 1800-luvun kirjailijan Elizabeth Gaskellin (1810-1865) viidessä romaanissa. Näissä romaaneissa, *Mary Barton* (1848), *Cranford* (1853), *North and South* (1855), *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) ja *Wives and Daughters* (1866), nälän, syömisen ja juomisen representaatiot heijastelevat ja ilmaisevat viktoriaanisen ajan Englannin luokkarakenteita, sukupuoli-, luokka- ja kulttuuri-identiteettejä sekä sosiaalisia ja kulttuurisia tapoja ja arvoja. Väitän työssäni että Gaskellin teksteissä sekä nälkä että ruoka ja juoma ja niiden kuluttaminen sekä rakentavat identiteettejä että ovat identiteettien rakentamisen välineitä. Ne määrittelevät ja niiden avulla määritellään kulttuurien ja sosiaalisten luokkien ja ryhmien rajoja. Niitä myös käytetään yhteisöllisyyden rakentamiseen ja ryhmien sisäisten hierarkioiden ilmaisemiseen.

Ruoan ja syömisen representaatiot ovat kasvava tutkimusalue angloamerikkalaisessa kirjallisuudentutkimuksessa. Varsinkin viktoriaanisen ajan kirjallisuudentutkimuksessa tämänkaltainen tutkimus on kuitenkin pitkään ollut sukupuolipainotteista ja tutkimuksen kohteena nimenomaan naishenkilöhahmojen suhde nälkään, ruokaan ja syömiseen; tämän suhteen nähtiin heijastavan 1800-luvun ideologisia ja kulttuurillisia käsityksiä naiseudesta. Vähemmän on tutkittu syömisen ja juomisen ja varsinkin nälän roolia sosiaaliseen luokkaan ja kulttuuriin liittyen. Väitän kuitenkin, että sosiaalisessa ja kulttuurisessa kontekstissa joka oli hyvin luokkatietoinen, mutta jossa sosiaalisten ryhmien ja luokkien rajat muuttuivat jatkuvasti ja jossa sosiaalisen identiteetin määritteleminen oli sen tähden haastavaa, ruoka ja juoma sekä

niiden kuluttamiseen liittyvät tavat ja erilaiset säännöt tarjosivat tärkeän tavan määritellä ja kontrolloida luokka- ja kulttuuri-identiteettejä sekä sosiaalisia rajoja.

Lukuun ottamatta lyhyehköjä yksittäisiä mainintoja, nälän ja syömisen representaatioita Elizabeth Gaskellin tuotannossa ei ole aikaisemmin laajemmin tutkittu. Tutkimukseni osoittaa että Gaskellin teksteissä ne ilmaisevat ennen kaikkea luokka- ja kulttuuri-identiteettejä sukupuoli-identiteettien lisäksi. Ne heijastavat 1800-luvun käsityksiä identiteetin rakentumisesta ja rakentamisesta ja paljastavat identiteetin käsitteen monimuotoisuuden viktoriaanisen ajan Englannissa mutta myös osittain kyseenlaistavat 1800-luvun nälkää ja syömistä koskevia käsityksiä. Tutkimukseni on luonteeltaan monitieteistä ja pohjautuu eri tieteenaloihin: sosiaali- ja kulttuurihistoria, sosiologia, psykologia, psykoanalyysi, feministiset teoriat, taloushistoria ja sosiaaliantropologia. Tutkimukseni perustuu vahvasti sille ajatukselle, että kirjalliset tekstit ovat paitsi tietyn historiallisen ja kulttuurisen myös tekstuaalisen kontekstin tuotteita ja siihen kytkeytyneitä.

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Abbreviations

References to novels and short stories by Elizabeth Gaskell are given in the text and abbreviated as follows:

C	*Cranford*
DG	"The Doom of the Griffiths"
LG	"The Last Generation of England"
MB	*Mary Barton*
MH	"Morton Hall"
NS	*North and South*
R	*Ruth*
SS	"The Squire's Story"
SL	*Sylvia's Lovers*
WD	*Wives and Daughters*

1. Introduction

In 1854 Elizabeth Gaskell wrote to Mr Cobden, a Manchester manufacturer, inviting him to share "the family dinner at four o'clock on Sunday", continuing that "four o'clock dinners may go under the name of lunch if you have any late dinners in prospect."[1] To another correspondent she writes "I will be delighted to see you … [w]e dine (which you can make your lunch) at one".[2] The easiness with which Gaskell invites the recipient of her letter to adjust the name of the meal to suit his needs and his social life, her awareness of the differences in the designation of the midday meal, and even her compromise compound noun "lunch-dinner"[3] that she uses in one of her letters illustrate the change and the relative confusion in the designation of meals and meal times in the nineteenth century. Although lunch as a meal existed before the nineteenth century, it acquired more significance as a part of the daily eating pattern during the Victorian era; late evening parties and balls that the fashionable upper classes attended meant that both breakfast and dinner were moved later, and lunch was introduced as a light midday meal between these two. Anne Wilson argues that 'lunch' was "a meal for the comfortably-off classes" whereas those less comfortably off as well as the working classes would call their midday meal a dinner. Whether the midday meal was "recognized" as lunch or not also depended on the eater's geographical position; in northern England the midday meal was mostly called dinner.[4] Gaskell also seems to be

[1] *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, eds. John Chapple and Alan Shelston (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 119.
[2] *Further Letters*, 190.
[3] *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, eds. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966) 386.
[4] C. Anne Wilson, "Luncheon, Nuncheon and Related Meals," *Eating with the Victorians*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004) 42-3. Nothing has changed much in 150 years. To call the midday meal 'dinner' is still an indication of the speaker's working-class status. As Lindsy Lawrence

occupied by the times of meals in her letters: "After lunch (at 12) I went out with the girls … Then home, read[,] loitered and talked till dinner time (6 o'clock)."[5] In a letter to her daughter Julia, Gaskell states that "I am getting my lunch (or rather dinner) while I write. Ham sandwiches and beer if you wish to know; and it is 12 o'clock."[6] Noting the times of the meals is reminiscent of diary entries which detail the course of the day yet it also conveys an awareness of the varied customs of her correspondents and of the society in general. Despite Gaskell's seeming nonchalant attitude to the designation of meals the issue was not socially insignificant in the nineteenth century. In *Plenty and Want: A Social History of Diet in England from 1815 to the Present Day* (1979), John Burnett notes that when one ate, what one ate, and how food was prepared became important indicators of social standing in the nineteenth century especially among the middle and upper classes.[7]

Food, or the lack of it thus mattered in the nineteenth century; Andrea Broomfield notes in *Food and Cooking in Victorian England* (2007) that Victorian foodways[8] reflected and expressed Victorian "class structures, intergenerational and gender relationships, national and regional identities, customs and values, and their economy."[9] In this study, I explore these issues by discussing the role and meaning of representations of hunger and the consumption of food and drink in Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction, so far a largely neglected approach, concentrating on five of her novels: *Mary Barton* (1848), *North and South* (1855), *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), *Cranford* (1853), and

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points out, postponing the dinner time was also a middle-class necessity since an increasing number of middle-class men would commute to work and return home for the day's main meal only in the evening (Lindsy Lawrence, "Gender Play 'At Our Social Table': The New Domesticity in the *Cornhill* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*," *The Gaskell Journal* 22, 2008, 31).

[5] *Letters*, 51.

[6] *Letters*, 293.

[7] John Burnett, *Plenty and Want: A Social History of Diet in England from 1815 to the Present Day* (London: Scolar Press, 1979) 77-8.

[8] With 'foodways' I mean the customs and habits concerning food and food consumption.

[9] Andrea Broomfield, *Food and Cooking in Victorian England: A History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007) xi.

Wives and Daughters (1866). I explore how hunger, food and foodways are represented in Gaskell's narratives and argue that they not only reflect but also contradict and contest the nineteenth-century ideas concerning hunger and food consumption. My contention is that in these texts, individual, social and cultural identities are constructed and reconstructed through the media of hunger, food, and drink. Further, representations of food and foodways express a sense of community and communality and sometimes even a nostalgic longing for the past. In addition to the role of food and drink as something to be consumed by the individual, food can be a gift and I argue that with and through the gifts the donors express not only different emotions, expectations and assumptions, but also define and redefine identities.

Studies of food in literature have gradually gained more prominence in recent years yet apart from occasional remarks such as Dena Attar's statement in "Keeping Up Appearances: The Genteel Art of Dining in Middle-Class Victorian Britain" (1991) that "[m]eals are a rich source of social comment in Mrs Gaskell's novels"[10] or fleeting analyses of individual texts such as Helena Michie's in *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (1987), a study of the portrayal of women's bodies in nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts, in which she briefly discusses female hunger and eating in *Mary Barton*, *Cranford* and *Wives and Daughters*, the two latter being given as examples of texts in which "delicate appetites and ladyhood" are equated,[11] there are no full-length studies which would examine the role of hunger, food, and eating in Gaskell's work. Natalie Kapetainos Meir has analysed Gaskell's use of "eating

[10] Dena Attar, "Keeping Up Appearances: The Genteel Art of Dining in Middle-Class Victorian Britain." *'The Appetite and the Eye': Visual Aspects of Food and its Presentation Within Their Historic Context*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991) 138.
[11] Helena Michie, *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 26.

rituals" in *Cranford* as a part of a larger pattern of social conventions;[12] in *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England* (2008) Julie E. Fromer examines the meanings of tea drinking and tea rituals in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, and most recently, in *The Discourses of Food in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (2010), the first book-length study on the topic, Annette Cozzi discusses *Mary Barton* in connection with food and national identity,[13] yet no studies address the meanings of food and foodways in Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction in any greater degree.

From being a popular and esteemed writer in her own lifetime, after her death in 1865 Gaskell gradually sank into near oblivion. For a long time, her literary fame was supported almost solely by *Cranford* which went through several editions and was considered the best of her novels at the time of her death.[14] David Cecil's assessment of Gaskell in *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation* (1934) as a "minor novelist" and of her work as mostly insignificant and characterised by her gender[15] set the tone for subsequent criticism of Gaskell's work. It was only in the 1960s and 1970s that her work began to be reassessed; the industrial novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South* experienced a renaissance in the hands of the socially and politically committed Marxist critics who were interested in the social and political ideologies in these

[12] Natalie Kapetainos Meir, "'Household Forms and Ceremonies': Narrating Routines in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*," *Studies in the Novel* 38.1 (Spring 2006) 1.
[13] Julie E. Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008); Annette Cozzi, *The Discourses of Food in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[14] Nicholas Rance, *The Historical Novel and Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1975) 139. For a thorough discussion on the publication history of *Cranford*, see Thomas Recchio, *Elizabeth Gaskell's* Cranford*: A Publishing History* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009). Recchio notes that *Cranford* experienced a veritable renaissance in the 1890s when "with the publication of Hugh Thomson's illustrated version the sales boomed" (4). For more general publishing history of Gaskell's work as well as for her relationship with the nineteenth-century publishing industry, see Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *Victorian Publishing and Mrs. Gaskell's Work* (Charlottesville: Unversity Press of Virginia, 1999).
[15] David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation* (London: Constable, 1945) 197. He claims that "[t]he outstanding fact about Mrs. Gaskell is her femininity" (197). Cecil's discussions on Victorian novels and novelists were shadowed by the Modernist rejection of Victorian literature and culture in general.

novels.[16] With and after the Marxist criticism, it was the feminist criticism of the 1970s and 1980s that provided a beginning for the revaluation of Gaskell's whole oeuvre. While being barely mentioned in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's consequential study on Victorian women writers, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), Gaskell was discussed along with other Victorian female writers in Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Nina Auerbach's *Communities of Women* (1978), for example.[17] Especially after eating disorders became more widely known in the 1970s, feminist literary criticism has displayed a fair amount of interest in women's relationship with food and eating. In the 1980s and 1990s the discussions on nineteenth-century literature often drew rather straightforward and simplistic conclusions; in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, for instance, the writers contend that the female literary tradition is full of "obsessive depictions of diseases like anorexia," arguing that not only the characters in the novels but the authors as well were, literally or metaphorically, suffering from anorexia.[18] Since Gaskell's female characters, or indeed Gaskell herself, fit fairly uncomfortably with such description, her absence from the book is understandable.[19] Yet it was Patsy Stoneman's

[16] Louis Cazamian's *The Social Novel in England 1830-1850: Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs Gaskell, Kingsley*, first published in French in 1903 was the first critical book to group the nineteenth-century social-problem novels (also called industrial novels, factory novels, or 'condition of England' novels) and discuss them as a phenomena (Louis Cazamian, *The Social Novel in England 1830-1850: Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs Gaskell, Kingsley*, transl. Martin Fido, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973). In 1954 Kathleen Tillotson noted that it had remained "the standard survey of the field" for a half a century (Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954, 123).
[17] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).
[18] Gilbert and Gubar, xi, 57-8.
[19] Other writers, such as Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, and Christina Rossetti, for example, drew more critical attention in this respect. Gilbert and Gubar, for example, discuss Catherine Earnshaw's "anorexia" in *Wuthering Heights* as a matter of fact (285). Another critic, Giuliana Giobbi, argues that starvation is one of the main themes in *Wuthering Heights*; she considers Catherine one of "the female victims of anorexia" (Giuliana Giobbi, "No Bread Will Feed My Hungry Soul: Anorexic Heroines in Female Fiction – from the Example of Emily Brontë as Mirrored by Anita Brookner, Gianna Schelotto and Alessandra Arachi," *Journal of European Studies* 27 (March 1997) 87). Sheryl Craig argues that Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë implies that she had an eating disorder which is "mirrored in the actions of her character, Jane Eyre" (Sheryl Craig, "'My Inward Cravings': Anorexia Nervosa in *Jane Eyre*,"

Elizabeth Gaskell (1987) which was the first full-length feminist sudy on Gaskell's work; her contention was that Gaskell's work challenged the Victorian opposition of public and private, and celebrated female friendships and motherhood as advocates for social change. In her view, "the interaction of class and gender" is an important component of an effective reading of Gaskell's oeuvre.[20] The next step in Gaskell criticism was the 1980s and 1990s new historicist studies such as Catherine Gallagher's *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction* (1985), often considered the pioneer of new historicist approach to Victorian social problem novels, and Mary Poovey's *Making a Social Body* (1995) both of which re-examined Gaskell's social problem fiction alongside other novels of the genre as well as other discourses prevalent in the Victorian society and culture.[21] The influence of cultural studies is evident in the 1990s critical discussion on Gaskell; for example, placing Gaskell's work in the context of both Victorian literature and culture, Hilary Schor's *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (1992) discusses Gaskell's relationship with writing and publishing and in *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the*

Publications of the Missouri Philological Association 22 (1997) 45). On the other hand, Paula Marantz Cohen argues that Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" is basically about anorexia nervosa, and that not only the characters in the text but also the author was anorexic. According to her, "Christina Rossetti probably developed anorexia nervosa in her teens and continued to suffer from the illness in some form ever afterward" (Paula Marantz Cohen, "Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market': A Paradigm for Nineteenth-Century Anorexia Nervosa," *University of Hartford Studies in Literature* 17.1 (1985) 10). Other critics who have linked the fulfilment of the expectations concerning female body and female appetite in the form of self-induced starvation in both nineteenth-century life and literature to the symptoms of modern-day anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders are, for example, Paula Marantz Cohen, *The Daughter's Dilemma: Family Process and the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), Gail Turley Houston, *Consuming Fictions: Gender, Class, and Hunger in Dickens's Novels* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), and Anna Krugovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[20] Patsy Stoneman, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987) xi.

[21] Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832-1867* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985); Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830-1864*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Victorian Social Text (1997), Deirdre D'albertis examines the narrative practices in Gaskell's writing.[22]

In her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell* (2007), Jill L. Matus notes how "Elizabeth Gaskell has become a figure of growing importance in the field of Victorian literary studies"[23] and it is true that, although still lagging behind such critical favourites as Charles Dickens or George Eliot, for example, she is slowly shedding the mantle of a "minor novelist" and gaining a more prominent place in the field of Victorian studies. In recent years, Gaskell scholarship has expanded its interests regarding the texts studied and topics explored. Her shorter fiction, stories and essays, for example, are beginning to attract more and more critical interest[24] and critical essays on Gaskell's oeuvre engage in a variety of topics such as class, gender, and culture, theories of evolution, publishing, community making and breaking, genre, imperialism and colonialism. In his article "Where next in Gaskell Studies?" in *Elizabeth Gaskell, Victorian Culture and the Art of Fiction: Original Essays for the Bicentenary* (2010), a collection of articles published to commemorate the bicentenary of Gaskell's birth, Alan Shelston reviews critical interest on Gaskell's work since the 1960, pondering the possible directions for Gaskell studies in the future.[25] The intention of the present study is to provide one answer to Shelston's question and to fill in a gap

[22] Hilary M. Schor, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Deirdre d'Albertis, *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997). For a more thorough discussion on Gaskell's reception, critical and non-critical, inside and outside of academia see Susan Hamilton, "Gaskell Then and Now," *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill L. Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[23] Jill L. Matus, Introduction, *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill L. Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 1.

[24] For a recent discussion on Gaskell's shorter texts see, for example, Shirley Foster, "Elizabeth Gaskell's Shorter Pieces" in *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill L. Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[25] Alan Shelston, "Where next in Gaskell Studies?" *Elizabeth Gaskell, Victorian Culture and the Art of Fiction: Essays for the Bicentenary* (Gent: Academia Press, 2010).

in Gaskell scholarship by providing a lengthy discussion on the representations and role of hunger and consumption of food and drink in her fiction.

This study is divided in eight parts: the present introduction, a chapter on theories of hunger and consumption followed by five chapters each concentrating on one novel, and a conclusion. Although beginning with *Mary Barton*, Gaskell's first novel, and ending with *Wives and Daughters*, her last one, I will not discuss the novels in chronological order. Instead, the order is based on thematic affinities and thus the industrial novel *Mary Barton* will be followed by and in a sense paired off with *North and South*. On the other hand, *Cranford* is paired off with *Wives and Daughters* because they both largely focus on the customs and values of the middle classes. In between these two 'pairs' I will discuss *Sylvia's Lovers*, a historical novel which seems not to include "any social themes"[26] as W. A. Craik argues or which does not focus on the manners of the middle classes. Nonetheless, I would argue that there is a social theme in *Sylvia's Lovers* which links it with *Mary Barton* and *North and South* and the novel's engagement with the foodways of a community, albeit a working-class one, provides a link to the themes of *Cranford* and *Wives and Daughters*.

The chapter following this general and critical introduction is an introduction to the theoretical underpinnings of the present work. The acts of consuming food and drink construct and reconstruct identities and define individual, social, and national boundaries; social and cultural identities are created and maintained through differences in consumption of food and drink and the concept of taste is used to define social and cultural boundaries. Food consumption and hunger have socio-economic and even socio-political dimensions; in nineteenth-century England, the perceptions of hunger

[26] W. A. Craik, *Elizabeth Gaskell and the English Provincial Novel* (London: Methuen, 1975) 179. On the other hand, Joseph Kestner argues that *Sylvia's Lovers* is a social novel (Joseph Kestner, *Protest and Reform : The British Social Narrative by Women 1827-1867*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, 194).

and the hungry, for example, were influenced by political economy, moral philosophy, and the rise of the humanitarian narrative. There is no one theory of food consumption that could be applied when discussing food in literature; there are only theories and discourses of food and eating that can be used to discuss food in literature. My study is strongly influenced by new historicism and its practice of emphasising the (textual) context of literary texts and parallelling them with non-literary ones. I agree with the new historicist idea that literary texts are products of and embedded in particular historical and cultural conditions and that there is an interaction between literature and other texts circulating in the shared context. New historicist readings make use of various disciplines and this is what makes new historicist methodology an appropriate tool in food studies which are by nature multidisciplinary.

The theories and theorists I use in this work can roughly be divided into different disciplines: sociology, social history, economy, cultural studies, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and feminist studies. I could have chosen to read the texts solely through a psychoanalytic or a feminist lens, for example, but wishing to avoid one-dimensionality which in many ways is such a foreign concept when it comes to consuming food and drink, I have decided to embrace the ramifications of food studies and food systems thus hoping to reach a more multidimensional picture of the role of hunger and consumption in Gaskell's texts. Having said this, my analyses and discussions focus to a great degree on the social and cultural dimensions of hunger and food consumption. It is nearly impossible to discuss representations of hunger, eating, or drinking in a nineteenth-century context without references to class and gender. My analyses are influenced by the method of 'thick description' the use of wich new historicism has adopted from the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz.[27] Roughly

[27] The concept 'thick description' was devised by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle and developed by Clifford Geertz in his essay "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" in his book *The*

defined, thick description is an analysis of specific social or cultural practices which takes into account and analyses their background and context to discover broader interpretations of them. One of the aims of thick description is to discover the shared codes which reveal patterns in cultural systems. In this work, the aim is to reveal the interconnection between hunger and consumption and social, cultural, and gender identities.

In the third chapter I will discuss *Mary Barton* where the representations of hunger and consumption of food and drugs highlight the social and cultural otherness of the poor working class characters as regards to the middle-class characters in the novel and also to the implied middle-class readers. *Mary Barton* was Gaskell's first novel and was first published in 1848, in a decade that is now known as the 'hungry forties'; similar to other industrial novels it addresses the social and economic problems arising out of the industrialisation, reflecting the growing economic inequality, the plight of the industrial working class and their relations with their employers, and the emerging trade unionism and Chartism. One of the problems the poor working class characters in *Mary Barton* face is hunger, caused first by decrease in income and then by unemployment, both results of flagging trade. The workers are debilitated by hunger and slowly starving, or "clemming" (MB 74) according to the local dialect, to death. Apart from a tentative hunger strike as part of the trade union strike strategy, they are presented more or less as passive victims of hunger, and thus of the laws of economy. At the time the novel was written, trade unions were still a relative novelty and under suspicion; they were seen as potentially engendering revolutionary action and to form one was even temporarily forbidden by the Combination Acts of 1799-1800, which were repealed in 1824 and the absence of which Mr Thornton in *North and South* regrets when facing a

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Interpretation of Cultures (1973). For a lengthy discussion on Geertz and Ryle in the new historicist context see, for example, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000) 20-31.

strike: "I wish the old combination laws were in force" (NS 144).[28] In *Mary Barton*, the narrator's statement that "[c]ombination is an awful power. It is like the equally mighty agency of steam; capable of almost unlimited good or evil" (MB 203) reflects the nineteenth-century fear of mass uprising; in the novel, trade union still retains its slightly dubious air of secret societies for it is after all in a trade union meeting where the decision to teach the mill-owners a lesson is made: "Then came one of those fierce terrible oaths which bind members of Trades' Unions to any given purpose" (MB 223). It is John Barton, a member of the trade union, whose gradual decline from an industrious factory worker to an opium addict the novel reports and who ends up murdering Harry Carson, the son of one of the mill owners.[29] Hunger and the use of opium are intertwined in the novel for the working class characters use opium to escape the grim reality and even more poignantly to substitute food. The story of John Barton is intertwined with that of his daughter, Mary Barton, whose rejected suitor Jem Wilson is accused of the murder John Barton commits. The murdered young man has been Jem's rival for Mary's love, and her efforts to provide him with an alibi feature prominently in the second half of the novel. In *Mary Barton*, representations of consumption and hunger articulate class and gender; they are expressions of exclusion from social and economic power.

In chapter four, I will move on to *North and South*, Gaskell's second industrial novel, which approaches the problems of the industrialised North in a more subtle way, and in which hunger, food, and eating are used as loci of power and control and in which representations of fruit and gifts of fruit articulate not only loss of innocence and

[28] Patrick Brantlinger notes that in the early Victorian era the distrust and even "horror" of the trade union activities was connected with "the larger 'fear of revolution'" (Patrick Brantlinger, "The Case Against Trade Unions in Early Victorian Fiction," *Victorian Studies* 13, 1969, 41).
[29] The murder of Harry Carson had a real-life counterpart, often considered as a likely source for it, in the murder of Thomas Ashton, a son of a mill-owner, who was shot dead during the Ashton and Stalybridge lock-outs in 1831.

romantic and sexual feelings but also an attempt to control the relationship between the donor and the recipient. The novel was published in a volume form in 1855, having first been published serially in shorter form in Dickens's *Household Words* in 1854-55, by which time many of the problems the industrial novels address were less pressing or had even been solved, either by legislation or by the improved economic situation. Yet the novel does present the mill workers' precarious position in a society which is driven by laissez-faire politics and profit seeking; it explores the conflict between the employers and the employees, one outcome of which is a strike as a protest against unacceptable terms of employment. There are discussions on the social and economic situation, many of which have Carlylean undertones; in their sophistication they are far from the assurance of the author's ignorance of political economy presented in the preface to *Mary Barton* where she claims to "know nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade" (MB xxxvi).[30] In *North and South*, North and South converge when Margaret Hale, a parson's daughter from the south of England, who is forced to move to the industrial town of Milton-Northern, a barely disguised Manchester, when her father leaves the Church and becomes a private tutor, meets John Thornton, a northern mill-owner and a self-made man who becomes one of her father's pupils. Their meeting is also a clash between what Pierre Bourdieu calls cultural capital and economic capital. Margaret's understanding of the world of the industrialised North and the poverty and

[30] In *North and South* Gaskell uses concepts such as "cash nexus" (420) which Carlyle had used both in *Chartism* and *Past and Present*. In his introduction to Carlyle's *Past and Present*, Chris Vanden Bossche notes that although the influence of *Past and Present* can be seen in *Mary Barton* as well (Chris Vanden Bossche, Introduction, *Past and Present*, by Thomas Carlyle, ed. Chris R. Vanden Bossche, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, lvi), it is "palpable" in *North and South* (xix). Much of the discussion on industrial issues in *North and South* in the chapter called "Masters and Men" is influenced by Carlyle. Marjorie Garson actually lists references to Carlyle's *Past and Present* in the chapter on *North and South* in *Moral Taste: Aesthetics, Subjectivity, and Social Power in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Marjorie Garson, *Moral Taste: Aesthetics, Subjectivity, and Social Power in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007, 435-6). Jo Pryke notes that Gaskell uses the ideas of political economy both "explicitly and implicitly" in *North and South*, that is, the term is actually mentioned a few times in the course of the narrative but the concepts of political economy also influence other discussions on industrial system and industrial relations (Jo Pryke, "The Treatment of Political Economy in *North and South*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 4 (1990), 29, 36.

suffering of the mill workers, as well as the reasons for striking, is deepened by her friendship with the working-class Nicholas Higgins and his two daughters.

Despite the more subdued tone, the novel critically examines the hunger of the industrial workers as part of an unfavourable economic climate and as part of the industrial action they take. There are no representations of opium use in *North and South*; instead, in the carding rooms of the cotton mills the hungry workers fill their lungs and their stomachs with fluff which temporarily appeases their hunger but also causes the industrial disease known as byssinosis. The representations of hunger, food and drink in the novel express not only differences between the classes but also within the rapidly swelling nineteenth-century middle class; they create and recreate social and cultural identities and imply attempts to control the limits of social bodies.

Sylvia's Lovers, which is discussed in chapter five, is Gaskell's only full-length historical novel, published in 1863. In the novel, the representations of food and drink provide a nostalgic glimpse to the past and to sharing food and drink which articulate not only a sense of community but also subtle gradations of inner hierarchies. *Sylvia's Lovers* is set in the last decade of the eighteenth-century in a Yorkshire town of Monkshaven where the main sources of income are farming and the whaling industry. The narrative is shadowed by the Napoleonic Wars and the impressment of sailors into military service both of which influence the main turns of the plot in the novel. *Sylvia's Lovers* is nevertheless also a story about love and deceit; Sylvia Robson falls in love with Charlie Kinraid, a whaler, who is captured by the press-gang, an incident which is witnessed by Philip Hepburn, Sylvia's cousin, who is in love with Sylvia himself. Philip withholds the truth of his rival's fate and lets it be believed that he is drowned. After Sylvia's father Daniel Robson is sentenced to death for instigating a riot against the press-gang, Philip's emotional and financial support to his aunt and cousin gradually

wins Sylvia over and she consents to marry him, mostly out of gratitude. When Charlie Kinraid returns to claim Sylvia, Philip's deceit is revealed and Sylvia renounces her marriage with Philip. Philip decides to leave Monkshaven, enlists in the navy under a false name, and ends up in the siege of Acre where he saves Charlie's life. After being injured in an explosion, Philip returns to England and finally to Monkshaven where he decides to live incognito and in poverty rather than make himself known and claim back his former life.

Begun in 1859, *Sylvia's Lovers* was finished during the Lancashire Cotton Famine of 1862-3, caused by the American Civil War which stopped the importation of cotton and the operation of the mills.[31] Yet the representations of hunger and famine that the novel provides are more to do with lack of love rather than food, apart from the ending which introduces famine caused by the war with France and a failed crop as well as "the corn laws" (SL 435) which were used to protect the British corn trade from cheap imports; importing foreign corn was allowed only when the price of domestic corn would reach a certain level. It is only in the juxtaposition of private and public that the novel approaches any social problems; whether impressments or taxes on "t'vittle [victual]… and t' very saut to 't" (SL 51), the government actions are seen as oppression by most of the characters. The discrepancies behind the seemingly homogeneous Monkshaven community, comprised of farmers, whalers and middle-class shopkeepers, are revealed in the scenes of communal consumption of food and drink while the consumption of alcohol stresses not only the gender division as regards to it but also the temporal differences between the time of the narration and the time of the narrative.

[31] Marion Shaw tentatively links the writing process of the novel with the American Civil War and The Cotton Famine (Marion Shaw, "*Sylvia's Lovers*, Then and Now," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 18 (2004) 41). Jenny Uglow, on the other hand, notes that the final third volume was "written amid the shadows of the cotton famine", a fact she sees as affecting both the tone and the content of the third volume (Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Habit of Stories*, London: Faber & Faber, 1993, 504).

Chapter six discusses *Cranford* where the representations of hunger, food and gifts of food create and recreate a sense of community and a sense of self. The novel was published in June 1853; the first two chapters first appeared as one sketch in *Household Words* in December 1851. In 1865 Gaskell stated in a letter to John Ruskin, who had expressed a liking for the novel, that "[t]he beginning of Cranford was *one* paper in Household Words, – and I never meant to write more; so killed poor Capt Brown, – very much against my will."[32] The one paper was thus meant to remain the whole 'story' of Cranford but was followed by seven more instalments during 1851-1853. Gaskell had already explored themes that are central to *Cranford*, such as the "elegant and economical principles" (LG 190) of food consumption and entertaining, in a short sketch called "The Last Generation in England" which had been published in an American periodical in 1849.[33] In *Cranford* Gaskell coins the phrase 'elegant economy' which expresses the guiding principle among the protagonists, a group of impoverished genteel ladies. In *Cottage Economy* (1822), William Cobbett argues that the term 'economy' does not mean cutting expenditure or being parsimonious but "management, and nothing more"[34] and when practising 'elegant economy' the characters in *Cranford* manage, and even discipline, not only their own household but also their community.

[32] *Further Letters*, 268. Italics original. Critics have often pointed out that *Cranford* has no formal plot but seems to be more a collection of sketches than a novel. Two of the central characters, Miss Jenkyns and Captain Brown, are killed at the end of the second chapter which indicates Gaskell's original plan of *Cranford* as a one-off sketch. Cranford is usually understood as a representation of Knutsford where Gaskell spent most of her childhood. See, for example, Margaret Case Croskery "Mothers without Children, Unity without Plot: *Cranford*'s Radical Charm," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 52 (2) (1997), 202, or Jeffrey Cass "'The Scraps, Patches, and Rags of Daily Life': Gaskell's Oriental Other and the Conservation of Cranford," *Papers on Language and Literature* 35 (1999), 418.

[33] Like *Cranford*, also "The Last Generation in England" is understood as been modelled after Knutsford.

[34] William Cobbett, *Cottage Economy* (London: C. Clement, 1822) 1. In fact, according to Raymond Williams, this is how the concept of economy was understood, as a form of managing a household and a community, before it gained its meaning as "the description of a perceived system of production, distribution, and exchange" (Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 11). According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, the etymological origins of the word 'economy' are in ancient Greek in which the word meant "management of a household or family, husbandry, thrift, arrangement". "economy, n.". James Mulvihill notes that the concept of economy in *Cranford* is linked with social, both of which "satisfy needs other than those of strict utility" (James Mulvihill, "Economies of Living in Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 50.3 (1995) 347).

The novel explores resistance to change but also the implications of the changes the central characters have been through as regards their economic status; the outcome of these changes is revealed in the representations of food consumption and the genteel hunger of the characters.

Chapter seven concentrates on *Wives and Daughters*, Gaskell's last novel, in which meals, food, and drink are consciously and unconsciously used to draw social boundaries and to construct and reconstruct social identities and social images. The novel was not quite finished before Gaskell died in November 1865 but her notes indicate that it was very near completion and make clear how the novel would have ended. Although set in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and seemingly returning to a near pastoral idyll before the times of trouble, *Wives and Daughters* can be read as a "commentary on the materialistic values of the society of the 1860s," as Anna Unsworth points out.[35] The materialistic values are exemplified by the silly, hypocritical, and slightly opportunist Mrs Gibson whose social emulation and desire for social distinction direct her conduct and consumption habits throughout the novel. A widow of a curate and a former governess of the Cumnors, the local aristocrats, she marries Mr Gibson, the Hollingsford doctor, to be able to live the life of a leisured housewife. The novel also describes Molly Gibson's, the doctor's daughter's, relationship with her new step-sister Cynthia and her growing intimacy with the upper-class Hamley family which, according to Gaskell's notes, would end with the marriage of Molly and Roger Hamley, a scientist who is often been seen as modelled after Charles Darwin.[36]

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[35] Anna Unsworth, "Some Social Themes in *Wives and Daughters*, II: The Social Values of the 1860s and 'Old England' Compared," *Gaskell Society Journal* 5 (1991) 51.

[36] See, for example, Mary Debrabant, "Birds, Bees and Darwinian Survival Strategies in *Wives and Daughters*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 16, 2002, or Leon Litvack, "Outposts of Empire: Scientific Discovery and Colonial Displacement in Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*," *Review of English Studies* 55, 2004. In 1864, in a letter to her publisher, Gaskell sketches Roger as "rough, & unpolished—but works

One of the recurring topics in the novel is how social identities and ideal characters are performed through consumption. Industrialisation and mass production of goods enhanced not only consumption but conspicuous consumption especially among the new rising middle class whose dwellings and meals often reflected their spending power. The overcrowded interiors that we now consider as the trademark of the style called Victorian owe greatly to the ever growing market of commodities. The Thornton's drawing-room in *North and South* is crowded and over-decorated with various objects: "Every corner seemed filled up with ornament, until it became a weariness to the eye" (NS 159) and in *Wives and Daughters* the middle-class Gibsons' drawing-room is decorated with "various little tables, loaded with *'objets d'art'* (as Mrs Gibson delighted to call them) with which the drawing room was crowded" (WD 426; italics original). Consumption of food and drink provided another arena in which enforce social identities but it was also an arena in which especially the concepts of female ideals were scrutinised. In *Wives and Daughters* the advocate of the female and social ideals and their connotations is Mrs Gibson whose behaviour in this context is critically examined in the narrative. To consume or to refuse to consume food and drink are both seen as means of expression in the novel where some of the characters articulate their feelings through food and drink to discipline, to control or to rebel.

Eating and drinking are ways of satisfying biological bodily needs but they, like hunger, signify much more; they are culturally and socially bound, carrying different meanings and connotations. They reflect society and culture, construct and reconstruct class and gender identities and create and maintain individual and collective identities as well as social and cultural expectations and assumptions. Discussing hunger, food and drink in literature is an equally multi-faceted topic and the next chapter is an

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out for himself a certain name in Natural Science,—is tempted by a large offer to go round the world (like Charles Darwin) as naturalist (*Letters*, 732).

introduction to the facets which form the basis of the discussions in the chapters on the individual novels.

2. Discourses of Food, Drink, and Hunger

For new historicist, culture is a collection of codes shared by a society which uses them to act and to communicate. All elements of culture from language and literature to dress, rituals, and food can be understood as codes which articulate not only culture but its power structures as well. The Foucauldian interest in power and the way it operates and the relationship between literature and power structures are some of the central concerns of new historicist critics and although the concerns of the present work are perhaps more diverse, there is an undercurrent of power running through both the representations of hunger and consumption in the novels and in the discussions on them. As topics, hunger and consumption of food and drink necessarily bring the human body into the centre of attention, a focus that Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, for example, consider as one of the points of interest of new historicism.[37] Apart from the obvious medical and scientific discourses, the way body and its functions have been perceived and understood are revealed in political, economic and historical discourses as well as the discourses directly concerning hunger and food. Despite the new historicist suggestion that no discourse "gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature" as H. Aram Veeser puts it in his introduction to *The New Historicism* (1989),[38] I will begin this chapter by discussing theoretical approaches to consumption and identity which are partly presented as 'unchanging truths': for example, regardless of time and place, every act of ingestion can be understood as not only 'real' but also symbolic.

[37] Gallagher and Greenblatt, 17.
[38] H. Aram Veeser, Introduction, *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989) xi.

Consumption and Identity

One of the main tenets of this work is the idea that consumption is closely intertwined with the concepts of self and the other; consuming food and drink define and are used to define individual and collective identities. To consume food is to engage in an act that according to the French sociologist Claude Fischler has fundamental meanings in constructing and sustaining human identity; he argues that the food we consume, or choose to consume, constructs us "biologically, psychologically and socially" and that ingesting food means ingesting not only its nutritional components but also all its imaginary and symbolic qualities.[39] Food keeps the body alive by providing nutrition but eating also affects our concept of self both as individuals and in relation to the socio-cultural environment we operate in; to consume food is to analogously consume its properties, both biological and symbolic, and in this way to be what one eats. The act of incorporation both includes and excludes; hence the practice of classifying and defining individuals or collective groups according to what they eat or are "imagined to eat (which generally arouses our irony or disgust)."[40] For the French, English are *les rosbifs* (the Roastbeefs), a denomination which the English seem to embrace and which seems to capture the essence of English food-consuming identity. According to Menno Spiering, beef "has been a signifier of Englishness at least since the sixteenth

[39] Claude Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity," *Social Science Information* 27.2 (1988), 275. Fischler's notion of food having both natural and symbolic dimensions resembles Deane W. Curtin's idea of objectified and participatory relationships to food and eating. Curtin suggests that our relationship with food can be considered objectified which means that "food is understood as 'other'," that is, food is something that nourishes the body only and does not affect the mind; the mind and the body are seen as separate entities. Participatory relationship means that when we eat, food becomes part of what we are, in addition to nourishing the body it also nourishes the mind, "[w]e are defined by our relations to the food we eat." See Deane W. Curtin, "Food/ Body/ Person," *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food*, eds. Deane W. Curtin and Lisa M. Heldke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) 11.
[40] Fischler, 280.

century."[41] He argues that especially from the eighteenth century onwards beef eating has often defined English national identity specifically in relation to the French whose diet was seen as "over-refined and embellished" as opposed to the "honesty and simplicity" of English food.[42] Thus roast beef, for example, would be "a patriotic emblem"[43], as Ben Rogers puts it; it would be a tool with the help of which national identity is defined and enforced. Instead of reflecting the actual food consumption habits of the English, roast beef would be a criterium against which 'Englishness' is measured. Not surprisingly, the popular personification of Great Britain, John Bull, whose name already refers to a source of meat, is characterised by his liking of beef.[44] Although it is not fully clear why meat and especially roast beef have come to articulate English national identity, in addition to masculine prowess it "stands for affluence, strength, health, confidence", as Spiering contends.[45] In other words, meat embodies desirable properties; consuming meat would both construct and reconstruct the consumer's identity as English and create a sense of belonging for according to Fischler, when consuming food the eater not only "incorporate[s] the properties of food, but … food incorporates the eater into a culinary system and therefore into the group which pratices it".[46] Food choices can thus be used not only to eliminate the possible hazards, both biological and symbolic, embodied by food consumption but also to embrace one's hopes of individual or social transformation and consequently to become

[41]Menno Spiering, "Food, Phagophobia and English National Identity," *Food, Drink and Identity in Europe*, ed. Thomas M. Wilson (New York: Rodopi, 2006) 32. Robert Appelbaum notes that already in the sixteenth-century England beef connoted, in addition to excellent nutritional value, "prestige and national pride" (Robert Appelbaum, *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture, and Food Among the Early Moderns*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, 4).
[42] Spiering, 32-33.
[43] Ben Rogers, *Beef and Liberty* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2003) 9.
[44] Another way to celebrate Englishness and beef was a patriotic ballad "The Roastbeef of Old England" originally from Henry Fielding's comic opera *The Grub-Street Opera* (1731) which was never performed. The song got a second chance when Fielding included it in his *Don Quixote in England* first performed in 1734. More stanzas were added over time and it became a popular song sung in banquets and celebrations. It is still used in the Royal Navy.
[45] Spiering, 39.
[46] Fischler, 280-1.

"what one would like to be." If one is what one eats then it is "natural that the eater should try to make himself [or herself] by eating."[47]

When making and remaking oneself through foodways, like Mrs Gibson in *Wives and Daughters* attempts to do, one is also creating something the sociologist Colin Campbell calls "character". He argues that every individual act is part of a process of creating a character which is based on a certain individual ideal; to maintain the ideal character one has to behave in a way that enforces and confirms it.[48] Consumption, including the consumption of food, can be seen as a series of acts that constantly recreate and confirm one's ideal way of behaving and Campbell notes that this confirmation is engendered by the individuals' own need to 'keep up appearances' in their own eyes rather than in the eyes of the society in general.[49] The individual ideal is nevertheless largely determined by social and cultural ideals and therefore the character one creates must be influenced by and be even dependent on one's socio-cultural environment and therefore also responsive to it.

Consumption articulates identity; it is also partly a process of identification which expresses inclusion in and/or exclusion from a group and consuming food together, for example, creates a sense of community and sharing, or even "*solidarity*" as E. N. Anderson argues in *Everyone Eats* (2005), an anthropological approach to food and eating.[50] Anderson points out how eating together and especially providing others with food, or meals, is an integral element in all social intercourse, from personal to political, one purpose of which is to establish "social alliances". Yet a meal also communicates more or less subtle "social messages" concerning the eaters and their

[47] Fischler, 281-2.
[48] Colin Campbell, "Understanding Traditional and Modern Patterns of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century England: A Character-Action Approach," *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993) 45-6.
[49] Campbell, 46.
[50] E. N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) 125. Italics original.

respective social or individual worth.[51] In *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (1989), Bruce Lincoln notes that sharing a meal forges connections, albeit often temporary: "of all human behaviors, there is none more conducive to the integration of society than the ritual sharing of food". Collective food consumption may strengthen and create feeling of communal spirit but as Lincoln points out, communities should not be defined in terms of inclusion and exclusion only, but also in terms of their inner hierarchies, communicated through, and "constructed and regularly reconstructed in, mealtime rituals by means of particularities of menu, portion, seating arrangements, order of service, and the like."[52]

Consumption of food and drink construct and reconstruct individual, social, and cultural identities; they unite but also separate. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), an analysis of the production and reproduction of taste with regard to class position, Pierre Bourdieu notes that "social identity is defined and asserted through difference"[53] and differences in consumption of food and drink create and sustain social identities. He argues that consumption practices and notions of taste not only create and maintain differences between social classes but also sustain class hierarchy and the hegemony of the upper classes.[54] Taste, both cultural and "the elementary taste for the flavours of food",[55] is used as a distinguishing tool. Tastes

[51] Anderson, 125-6.
[52] Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 87-8.
[53] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 172.
[54] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 7. Influenced by structuralism and often criticised for being by nature synchronic and not taking changes in tastes and fashions, or shifts in class structure, or gender or age into account in its discussions on cultural practices and taste, Bourdieu's study nevertheless remains an influential, albeit also debated, work. For a recent revaluation of Bourdieu's study see Tony Bennett et al., *Culture, Class, Distinction*, (London: Routledge, 2009) which maps cultural practices in present-day Britain. It may appear odd that in a work which discusses nineteenth-century English literature and culture, one of the pivotal theoretical works would be a sociological study on the relationship between class position and cultural taste in mid-twentieth-century France. Yet Bourdieu's notions concerning taste and consumption of food, in addition to those on cultural consumption, provide viable and legitimate theoretical starting points when analysing consumption of food and drink in Gaskell's work.
[55] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 99.

declare difference which imply the rejection of others' tastes, or "manifested preferences"[56] as Bourdieu calls them; they articulate "distastes" for the preferences of others which are deemed 'unnatural' as opposed to one's own 'natural' ones. Nevertheless, the preferences considered natural, or innate, are part of "habitus", the acquired set of tendencies of behaviour, taste, and thought one has as a result of upbringing and education, and therefore not as much natural as learnt.[57] They are nevertheless presented as "legitimate taste"[58] by the dominant class culture (the bourgeoisie) and used to create and enforce distinctions. Bourdieu contends that taste is expressed in all the choices one makes concerning one's behaviour, dress, living and food;[59] it changes "objectively classified practices … into classifying practices" which are a "symbolic expression of class position" and a certain lifestyle.[60]

Taste, in cultural as well as food consumption, is thus a social signifier, serving as a differentiating factor, and legitimate taste is finally class taste. Yet one's preferences, and thus one's taste, also differentiate at national and cultural levels and consequently express one's cultural and national identities. In *All Manners of Food* (1985), the sociologist Stephen Mennell notes that "[t]astes in food … are socially shaped, and the major forces which have shaped them are religions, classes and nations." He argues that in the European context, class has been the most significant power in the shaping of tastes. Food has been a tool for negotiating social positions and a tool of social advancement; tastes in food have been a way to distinguish between more and less desirable foodways. Nevertheless, as he further notes, food preferences

[56] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 56
[57] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 56.
[58] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 16.
[59] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 173.
[60] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 175.

and tastes are also affected by national and cultural factors.[61]

Central to Bourdieu's discussion on taste is the concept of 'cultural capital' which refers to the tastes, preferences, and knowledge "inherited from the family"[62] and which can be used much like 'economic capital' (money or property), as resources or as an investment, in social performance. This is close to what Veeser calls "prestige—the 'possession' of social assets"; these assets, such as taste, circulate in society similar to the more tangible currency, albeit less explicitly.[63] While Bourdieu mostly neglects the gender point of view, Veeser argues that for new historicist, "masculinity", for example, can be considered a social asset and thus a resource or currency usable in social transactions.[64] The ideas concerning the legitimate manner of consuming food and drink, or what are considered acceptable food and drink in the first place, express cultural capital and would thus be socially and culturally predetermined. For Bourdieu, consuming certain kinds of foods is an articulation of tastes which imply a specific approach to the body; the approach defines and is defined by the concept of the individual body the classes have. Simultaneously, tastes construct and reconstruct the social body, for according to Bourdieu "[t]aste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, *embodied*, helps to shape the class body."[65] For Bourdieu, "the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste", a taste that is shown not only by the body's proportions and its build but also by the manner in which it is treated, looked after and sustained. The body's "visible forms" and an individual's relationship to one's body are expressions of "the deepest dispositions of the habitus." The concepts and the ideals of

[61] Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) 17.
[62] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 22.
[63] Veeser, xiv.
[64] Veeser, xiv.
[65] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 190. Italics original.

the body, its shape and size as well as one's way of nourishing it express not only one's taste and therefore one's cultural capital but also one's social position.[66]

One of Bourdieu's theses is that food consumption is class-bound and therefore the food consumed and the way it is consumed specifies the consumer's class position; according to him, eating "with all due form" and observing certain formalities when it comes to meal times, for example, signals the consumers' upper- or middle-class identity.[67] A middle-class meal is an articulation of form, which has a "rhythm, which implies expectations, pauses, restraints", and food and eating occupy only a marginal role. Bourdieu claims that the marginalisation of food and the turning of a meal into "social ceremony" suggest the denial of the fundamental purpose of a meal: food consumption. Formalising food consumption with rules which concern the specific use of cutlery or the avoidance of noise, for example, serve not only to prioritise form but also underline the middle-class wish to distance oneself from the physical act of eating and thus the "animal nature… [and] primary needs" of human beings.[68] According to Bourdieu, social identity is also articulated by contrast between substance/form and quantity/quality which in food consumption is the difference between "the taste of necessity, which favours the most 'filling' and economical foods, and the taste of liberty—or luxury—which shifts the emphasis to the manner (of presenting, serving, eating, etc.) and tends to use stylized forms to deny function."[69] Consumption patterns would thus be class-bound, or at least are constructed as such, so that middle- and upper-class food consumption expresses the taste of luxury, emphasising form and quality.

[66] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 190.
[67] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 196.
[68] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 196.
[69] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 6.

The correct way of using cutlery and especially the changes in the use are part of what Norbert Elias calls the civilising process. In *The Civilizing Process* (1939), Elias traces the changes and 'civilising' of manners, including table manners, since the Middle Ages. The changes in social structure and social hierarchy have affected the way social rules and taboos have been defined; the way in which individuals perceive themselves as individuals and in relations with others has influenced the changing concepts of social control as well as the definition of what is good and what is bad manners.[70] The use of the knife when eating, for example, is regulated by "innumerable prohibitions and taboos" such as the rule that the knife should not be taken to mouth, a rule which Elias sees essentially a reflection of the fear of having a knife pointing at one's face. Yet the rule has "become a means of social distinction" so that the fear of hurting oneself with the knife has developed into the fear of "social degradation". Furthermore, Elias argues that the use of the knife is falling into decline so that not to use a knife at table, or use it as little as possible, is a signifier of good table manners.[71] As the writer of *The Habits of Good Society* (1867) already noted, "[e]verything that can be cut without a knife, should be cut with fork alone."[72] The use of other cutlery is regulated as well and the writer advises that "no epicure ever yet put knife to apple, and that an orange should be peeled with a spoon."[73] On the other hand, "there is no necessity to take a spoon for peas; a fork in the right hand will do."[74] Yet sometimes, as is evident in *Cranford*, an old-fashioned two-pronged fork would cause practical problems when eating peas and finding a socially accepted solution for the problem would not be easy.

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[70] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process. The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*, transl. Edmund Jepchott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
[71] Elias, 100-2. Still in the Medieval times it was customary to carry food into your mouth with a knife.
[72] Jane Aster, *The Habits of Good Society: A Handbook for Ladies and Gentlemen* (New York: Carleton, 1867) 295. The book discusses specifically English habits, making comparisons to the Continental ones.
[73] Aster, 292.
[74] Aster, 295.

In *Food, the Body, and the Self* (1996), a sociocultural study on the different meanings of food and eating, Deborah Lupton discusses hunger, food and eating in connection with subjectivity, emotions, embodiment and taste, as well as the civilised and the grotesque, noting that the distinction between eating in a more controlled and therefore more human manner and eating voraciously is reminiscent of the two modern western concepts of the body: the civilised and the grotesque. The civilised body is considered controlled and in conformity with the generally accepted rules of social decorum. It is "self-contained" as opposed to the Bakhtinian grotesque body which is "uncontained, unruly, less controlled by notions of propriety and good manners and … more 'animalistic'."[75] According to Bakhtin, "[e]ating and drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body" because they exemplify the open and transgressive nature of the body.[76] When the ideal notion of the body is a self-contained, or closed, civilised body as in the nineteenth century, then the ideals of food consumption emphasise control and good manners. Deborah Lupton notes that there was a gradual change from the less restrained food consumption and expression of hunger in the medieval times to the modern idea of self-control and allegiance to 'civilised' eating habits. Controlling one's appetite and paying attention to the quality of food became trademarks of middle- and upper-class refinement. The control over food consumption, which can finally be seen as the "desire to avoid the animalistic nature of humanity", became especially important in Victorian times when it came to "mark and reinforce social distinctions and rules of propriety.[77] To eat voraciously is to eat with disregard to socially accepted rules of food consumption; open manifestations of 'violent hunger' and voracious and uncontrolled eating can be seen as manifestations of

[75] Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: Sage, 1996) 19.
[76] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 281.
[77] Lupton, 21-22. The stress on the avoidance of "animalistic nature" is perhaps not surprising in an era that was troubled by the unsettling implications of evolutionary theories.

the grotesque and 'animalistic' body. A nineteenth-century conduct book warned about the hazards of food consumption by reminding the reader of the animal nature of the act: "Eating is so entirely a sensual, animal gratification, that unless it is conducted with much delicacy, it becomes unpleasant to others."[78] Food consumption was thus seen as hovering between what is human and what is animal and the boundary between these two was marked by the manner of eating. Adam Smith contends that public expressions of "the appetites which take their origin from the body", that is, hunger and sexual passion, break the rules of proper behaviour because they are basically reflections of animality and do not correspond with the ideal moral and social behaviour of a human being.[79] Elaborate dining rituals and table manners can be seen as a way to ensure that eating remains within the boundaries of humanity by providing parameters for eating in a civilised, non-animal way. As John F. Kasson points out, to consume food in a disorderly manner was considered "social obscenity."[80]

When discussing food consumption and how it is used to define social and cultural identities it needs to be considered as a part of a larger picture of consumption patterns and economic systems. Thorstein Veblen's socio-economic study *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (1899) explores the motives behind consumption patterns, arguing that all consumption, including consumption of food and drink, is socially and culturally meaningful. It is a sign of both economic and social standing; it is influenced by social relationships and driven by motives of emulation and envy.[81] When first published, the reception of Veblen's study was somewhat mixed; although subtitled an 'economic study', contemporary critics

[78] Cornelia Holroyd Richards, *At Home and Abroad; or, How to Behave* (New York: Evans and Brittan, 1853) 26.
[79] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 34.
[80]John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990) 199.
[81] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899, intr. C. Wright Mills (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1992).

considered the book more a political than economics work which idea was emphasised by the fact that many political radicals welcomed the book as criticism of the values of the capitalist society.[82] *The Theory of the Leisure Class* can indeed be seen as a satirical critique of consumerism and especially the consumption habits of the nineteenth-century upper class; Veblen coins a term 'conspicuous consumption' to refer to the wasteful spending the purpose of which is to display wealth and social status.

Veblen notes that emulation can be pecuniary or social although these two often intertwine. Pecuniary emulation aims at outdoing one's peers: one would acquire certain commodities just to feel superior to other consumers at the same social level. Social emulation, on the other hand, is the expression of the desire to adopt the idealised lifestyle and consuming style of the classes above.[83] Thus to consume expensive or rare articles of food or drink merely because they are expensive or rare could be considered pecuniary emulation and an expression of financial and social power within a social group. On the other hand, to incorporate certain kind of food, or to consume it in a certain manner, because of its symbolic class properties would express a desire to incorporate the properties and to be incorporated into the group. Veblen assumes that the desire to emulate forms the basis for all acts of consumption and that every human being has the desire to emulate others, to display one's wealth and/or to strengthen one's social position. Nevertheless, Campbell, for example, argues that there is a difference between emulation and imitation: the lower classes may imitate the consumption of the upper classes without any desire to be socially at the same level with them. Certain goods may also be consumed simply because they are desirable in themselves.[84] The difference between emulation and imitation is articulated in *Wives*

[82] Roger Mason, *The Economics of Conspicuous Consumption: Theory and Thought since 1700* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998) 58-9.
[83] Veblen, 80-81.
[84] Campbell, 40-1.

and Daughters; while Mrs Gibson is characterised by her social emulation and her social pretensions especially in the field of food consumption, both Mr Gibson's and his daughter Molly's motives are presented as more personal without implications of social emulation. Mr Gibson's need to hire a governess is presented as arising from individual motives reflecting the state of affairs in his house rather than from motives of social emulation: "when she [Molly] was about eight years old, her father perceived the awkwardness of her having her breakfasts and dinners so often alone with the pupils, without his uncertain presence. To do away this evil, more than for the actual instruction she could give, he engaged a respectable woman" (WD 33) to keep Molly company. When Molly Gibson sets the table for her new step-mother's first meal in the house she takes "great pains to arrange [the meal] on the table, as she had seen such things done at Hamley, intermixed with fruit and flowers" (WD 173). She imitates the class above her but it is not for the sake of social emulation; her motives are presented as being more personal for it is "an offering of good-will to her step-mother" and something that her father "would be gratified by" (WD 173).

Veblen argues that in an industrial society conspicuous leisure, that is, the possibility to spend one's life without having to labour for one's living, was replaced by conspicuous consumption as the main sign of pecuniary strength and thus social respectability.[85] Money and birth became interchangeable signs of respectability among the leisure class and thus impoverished genteel people who had no consuming power were nevertheless considered respectable and leisured.[86] And indeed, in *Cranford* the ladies of Cranford have not much consuming power yet they belong to the leisure class by birth as the narrator points out: "though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic" (C 7). The new wealthy middle classes became rivals for the traditional

[85] Veblen, 70-71.
[86] Veblen, 65.

upper classes in the field of social status for their increased wealth made it possible for them to partake in the conspicuous consumption placing them thus in certain respects at the same level with the traditional leisure classes. Since especially a lower middle-class man was often forced to participate in accumulating money, the middle-class wife's role was to participate in something Veblen calls "vicarious leisure and consumption"; she would consume and live, or at least pretend to live, a leisured life on behalf of the husband and thus be a sign of the household's consuming power and respectability.[87] This is the role Mrs Kirkpatrick in *Wives and Daughters* aspires to; as a widow she dreams of having a second husband and thus "some one who would work while she sat at her elegant ease in a prettily-furnished drawing-room" (WD 104).

According to Veblen, there is a certain level of consumption that is considered proper for different social classes.[88] Although one's standard of living is mostly determined by one's pecuniary means yet it is also determined by one's social class or one's social environment, and by the level of pecuniary consumption recognised as right by them. It is the responsibility of the social community indirectly to control the individual's level of consumption by different social sanctions.[89] In *Cranford*, the "*esprit de corps*" (C 7) requires implicit, and even explicit, control of collective food consumption and in *North and South* the middle-class Mr Hale questions the consuming habits of the working-class mill workers in Milton-Northern who purchase furniture and food which he considers "luxuries" (NS 158). In *Wives and Daughters*, when Lady Cumnor comments on Molly Gibson having a governess that "I should not have thought your father could have afforded to keep a governess" (WD 132), her comment implies not only her idea of the expected level of wealth of a country doctor but also the idea of

[87] Veblen, 68.
[88] Veblen, 111.
[89] Veblen, 86.

what can be seen as an acceptable level of consumption in his social class.[90] Questioning the amount and the level of consumption is more or less an expression of attempts to control the social body and to maintain class boundaries.

In *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (1988), Joan Brumberg posits that in the nineteenth-century England, food and controlling food consumption were essential elements in constructing a self but "[f]or women in particular, how one ate spoke to issues of basic character."[91] She argues that it was important to control female hunger because "an active appetite" for food connoted other bodily appetites, including sexual appetite, and women would be taught to curb these appetites in order to express "the highest moral and aesthetic sensibilities."[92] Hunger as the expression of the physical body and animalistic nature of the human being was doubly problematic for women whose bodies and sexuality were both denied and scrutinised in the nineteenth century.[93] In *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (2002), Anna Krugovoy Silver discusses the ways nineteenth-century writers used female hunger, appetite, and eating when creating female characters, arguing that there is a connection between anorexia and Victorian ideals and ideologies concerning the middle-class female body. According to Silver, to meet the expectations of a middle-class ideal of a woman as incorporeal, presented in medical and conduct literature of the era, it was essential to renounce the body; food consumption and meals provided a woman with a chance to exhibit "incorporeality through the small

[90] On the other hand, when a duchess in *Wives and Daughters* appears at a charity ball with no "vestige of a jewel or a diamond … and in a dress which farmer Hudson's daughter might have worn" (WD 290-1), the less aristocratic guests who have been expecting a spectacle of "diamonds and a coronet" (WD 292) are disappointed. The state of her dress and the lack of jewellery is not seen as conforming with the expected level of consumption deemed proper for an upper-class lady.
[91] Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) 178.
[92] Brumberg, 175-6.
[93] The construction of the ideal of middle- and upper-class females as non-sexual and incorporeal beings is contrasted with the increasing medical interest in the female body and the female reproductive system. See, for example, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts' Advice to Women* (London: Pluto Press, 1988).

appetite".[94] Yet slenderness as a female middle-class body ideal was an indication not only of having command over one's physicality but also of class. Slenderness and ethereal appearance, as well as delicate appetites, implied distance from labour and emphasised a middle-class woman's "decorative … social role."[95]

In *The Flesh Made Word,* Helena Michie argues that despite the frequent representations of food, eating, and dinners in Victorian fiction female characters are seldom portrayed "either eating or starving", and that their hunger is something that occurs only "offstage".[96] She sees this as a manifestation of a socio-cultural environment that limited representations of "women's hunger and work, both of which are associated with the body and with sexuality."[97] Although I would not argue that the presence or absence of female characters' hunger in Victorian literature would invariably be a symbol of Victorian ideologies of food consumption concerning women, it is true that female appetite, hunger, and eating practices were contested and ideologically charged issues in nineteenth-century Britain. They were linked with notions of especially the middle-class female character and behaviour as well as the general interest in or even "obsession with the bodies and appetites of Victorian middle-class women".[98] Linda Schlossberg notes how this obsession is manifest in the public reaction to the late nineteenth-century suffragettes' voluntary starvation to gain the vote; she argues that the hunger strikers can be seen as realising the cultural and social notions about women's appetite and hunger, taking them to the extreme, yet their choice not to eat at all was responded to by force feeding them and thus taking away their right

[94] Silver, 9. As Silver also points out, one cannot argue that the ideal presented in different discourses invariably reflected reality.
[95] Silver, 13.
[96] Michie, *The Flesh Made Word*, 12-13.
[97] Michie, *The Flesh Made Word* , 9.
[98] Linda Schlossberg, "Consuming Images: Women, Hunger, and the Vote," *Scenes of the Apple: Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Women's Writing,* eds. Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran (Albany: State University of New York, 2003) 94.

to control their own body.[99] Often the interest centred around the assumed and expected 'delicate' appetites and consequently minimal food consumption as the markers of proper delicate womanhood. Conduct books, such as John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* which was first published in 1774 but according to Mary Waters was "[s]till a standard in Gaskell's day",[100] often advised women against freely expressing their appetite so that they would retain their delicate femininity especially in the eyes of the male sex.[101] *The Habits of Good Society* gives the advice that a "lady should… not be ravenous at table; neither should she talk of eating or of the dishes".[102] Nevertheless, as Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran point out, a woman's "overly delicate appetite and overly thin body" were also criticised and seen as being even detrimental to health.[103] In *The Daughters of England* (1842), Sarah Stickney Ellis, a writer of several conduct books for women, advises young women "to eat regularly" to ensure health and warns against "that capricious abstinence from food … which by certain individuals is thought rather lady-like and becoming."[104]

Social and Cultural Context

When John Burnett's *Plenty and Want: A Social History of Diet in England from 1815 to the Present Day* (1966) was first published it was one of the first serious studies of the changes in diet and habits of eating since the industrial revolution and it still remains a standard survey in the field of food history. Burnett provides information on not only what people ate in the nineteenth century, and beyond, but also on the standard of

[99] Schlossberg, 94.
[100] Mary Waters, "Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Conduct Books: Mrs Gibson as the Product of a Conventional Education in *Wives and Daughters*," *Gaskell Society Journal* 9 (1995) 15.
[101] John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, 1774 (Boston: James B. Dow, 1834) 32.
[102] Aster, 875.
[103] Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran, "Introduction. Scenes of the Apple: Appetite, Desire, Writing," *Scenes of the Apple: Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Women's Writing*, eds. Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran (Albany: Sate University of New York, 2003) 23.
[104] Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Daughters of England. Their Position in Society, Character and Responsibilities* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1842) 136-7.

living; he also presents statistical information on the expenditure of diet and living. His study focuses first and foremost on the working-class consumption, which until then had attracted less attention, dispelling myths such as the assumption that nineteenth-century farm labourers were better fed than industrial workers, a myth that Gaskell also questions in *North and South*, or the belief that the working-class diet changed drastically in the course of the nineteenth century. Burnett notes how agricultural labourers' life and diet were also influenced by the fluctuations of economy which more or less determined what and how much they had to eat.[105]

The staple diet of the working class consisted of bread and bacon or bread and cheese; the amount of meat consumed by a working-class family depended on their financial situation. The efforts to make potato the working class staple food were unsuccessful, as E. P. Thompson notes in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963); potatoes not only connoted "degradation" but more specifically Irish degradation.[106] In *Cottage Economy* William Cobbett claims that potato eating drags "the English labourers down to the state of the Irish, whose mode of living, as to food, is but one remove from that of the pig".[107] The importance of bread in the working-class diet caused problems especially in situations where the price of bread placed it out of reach of the poorest. The Corn Laws, passed in 1815 and repealed in 1846, which prevented the import of cheap foreign corn to protect the British-grown corn also caused dietary hazards; when the crop failed, as happened in 1841, the price of corn and therefore also bread shot up and left part of the population starving. The situation in Ireland was even worse than in England since as a kind of an agricultural colony it was

[105] Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 30.
[106] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 1963 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984) 347-8.
[107] Cobbett, *Cottage Economy*, 49.

forced to export its crop to England, which left the Irish population starving especially after the failure of the potato crop in 1845.

The bread, especially bread made of wheat, that the nineteenth-century working class clung to had symbolic value in addition to its value as nutrition. Wheat, which still in the eighteenth century had been expensive luxury food, had replaced other corn as the ingredient for bread in the early nineteenth century. Burnett notes that this change was part of more general change in the way people lived and worked but he argues that it was affected by "social imitation among all classes" including imitation of food consumption patterns.[108] Similar to wheaten bread, also tea became an important part of the working-class diet in the first half of the nineteenth century;[109] replacing beer. Thus it seems that consumption of food and drink were democratised but as Burnett points out, wheaten bread and tea had been only two components in the diet of the wealthy but for the nineteenth-century working classes they often formed the whole "poverty-line" diet.[110]

There might have been a development towards a "greater social uniformity in food" as Mennell notes,[111] due to the industrialisation and the ever expanding food market, yet the quality and quantity of the food consumed by different sections of society varied notably. The concepts of plenty and want serve well to describe the context of consumption in nineteenth-century England: while part of the population struggled throughout the century to procure the bare necessity, others were free from economic constraints to pick and choose. Middle- and upper-class formal dinner parties approached conspicuous consumption; tables were opulent with food and as Burnett

[108] Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 16. Timothy Morton notes that the increasing working-class claim for white bread was a claim for social "respect" and a wish for "a radical revision of those social structures that inhibited such … respect" (Timothy Morton, "Consumption as Performance: The Emergence of the Consumer in the Romantic Period," Introduction, *Cultures of Taste/Theories of Appetite: Eating Romanticism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 4).
[109] Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 17; Thompson, 351.
[110] Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 17.
[111] Mennell, 200.

points out "the waste at dinner-parties and banquets must have been enormous".[112] The main purpose of a dinner party was not necessarily food consumption itself but the building and maintaining of social relationships as well as the display of the hosts' consumptive power, or as Burnett puts it, a dinner party "announced the taste, discrimination and bank balance of the donor."[113] This was especially important among the middle classes whose social standing was not yet stable; there was a need to strengthen one's social position by emulating the consumption patterns of the fashionable upper classes and show one's standard of living by ostentatious display of food. For one part of the population, food consumption was thus a social performance where social identities were created and articulated.

Tea held an important place in the diet of all classes; it was a commodity that transmuted from the luxury for the few to the drink of all, gradually acquiring the status of a national emblem and becoming "a national delight" as G. G. Sigmond argues in *Tea; Its Effects, Medicinal and Moral* (1839).[114] In *Liquid Pleasures* (1999), a study which demonstrates that drinking patterns and preferences are influenced not only by taste but also by class, gender, age, and geographical location, not to mention changing trends, John Burnett notes that tea was popular especially with the expanding middle classes whose tastes and preferences influenced the nineteenth-century consuming culture and who associated tea with "respectability, sobriety and a privatized home life in which women's tastes carried authority".[115] As the duty on tea diminished during the nineteenth century, tea replaced beer as the beverage consumed with meals and drunk

[112] Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 95. The idea of ceremonial gift giving 'potlatch' where the socially and financially powerful members of the community give lavish feasts and gifts to the community to display their wealth and to maintain their position sometimes consists of not only giving one's possessions away but also destroying them for the purpose of displaying one's wealth and social position. Both the food offered at a dinner party and the food thrown away after it thus constitute a potlatch: a manifestation of economic and social power.
[113] Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 78.
[114] G. G. Sigmond, *Tea; Its Effects, Medicinal and Moral* (London: Longman, 1839) 3.
[115] John Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures: Social History of Drinks in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999) 54.

for refreshment in the domestic sphere. Beer became "a recreational drink … used mainly by men"[116]; it was transformed from a drink consumed by all social classes into a drink with specifically working-class connotations. The change did not please all and William Cobbett, for example, considered beer, ideally self-brewed, highly preferable to tea as the drink for the working class. In his view, beer is more nutritious than tea which he condemns as "*good* for nothing, … a weaker kind of laudanum, which … communicates no strength to the body", the use of which is financially pernicious for the working class and the preparation of which takes too much time.[117] In his view, the use of tea is harmful regardless of class; in *Advice to Young Men, and (Incidentally) to Young Women in the Middle and Higher Ranks of Life* (1829), Cobbett advises against both tea and coffee, arguing that "those slops are *injurious to health*".[118] Unlike Cobbett, the nineteenth-century temperance movement saw tea drinking not only as raising the moral standards of the working class but also its economic position because tea was cheaper than alcohol; by the mid-nineteenth century the temperance movement had engaged tea as a means to wean people from alcohol: "tea would rescue men from the alehouse and women from the gin palace".[119]

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[116] Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures*, 179.
[117] Cobbett, *Cottage Economy*, 13-14. Italics original.
[118] William Cobbett, *Advice to Young Men, and (Incidentally) to Young Women in the Middle and Higher Ranks of Life* (London: William Cobbett, 1829) § 31, italics original. The American William Alcott also laments people's "slavery" to tea in *Tea and Coffee* (1839): "They will sooner go without their food than their tea, thousands will tell us, even when they use no milk, nor cream, nor sugar in it. And yet there is not a particle of nourishment in it, to say nothing of its positive poison" (William A. Alcott, *Tea and Coffee*, Boston: George W. Light, 1839, 112). Tamara Ketabgian argues that Alcott is here discussing specifically "the poor" being willing to forego food to be able to consume tea (Tamara Ketabgian, "Foreign Tastes and 'Manchester Tea-Parties:' Eating and Drinking with the Victorian Lower Orders," *Consuming Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century: Narratives of Consumption, 1700-1900*, eds. Tamara S. Wagner and Narin Hassan, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010, 128). Nevertheless, there is no evidence that Alcott is discussing the poor, or a certain social class, but simply those people who have submitted to "the slavery of habit" of drinking tea and have become addicted to it, either mentally or physically, or both (111-2). Although it is true that the working-class habit of spending a considerable portion of their income on tea instead of on nutritious foodstuff was often criticised, this is not on Alcott's agenda.
[119] Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures*, 63. Marianna Adler notes how the temperance movement in nineteenth-century "England arose at a time when drunkenness was becoming increasingly unfashionable and appeared to be decreasing among the working classes." The target groups of the temperance movement were mostly the working classes and Adler argues that the efforts made to decrease the consumption of alcohol of the working classes were partly "an ideological tool by which the capitalist class controlled the

In nineteenth-century England, tea was a socially marked commodity, articulating subtle differences between class, gender, and culture, as Julie E. Fromer demonstrates in *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England* (2008), a study of the role and representations of tea in different discourses of the era. She argues that the discourses were used to create and sustain not only national identities and ideologies but also social ones; tea gradually occupied the position of the national drink in the nineteenth-century tea discourse and its consumption created and sustained a common ideal English identity, separate from the consumers' individual class or gender identity.[120] Tea was considered a commodity that united its consumers, forging a common national identity and "temporarily erasing the boundaries between groups" such as class and gender.[121] Both Burnett and Fromer note that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, tea had connotations of domesticity and femininity as opposed to the masculine image of coffee.[122] Fromer argues that in Victorian narratives, tea and its consumption are usually connected with female characters.[123]

Tea was first imported to Britain from China in the mid-seventeenth century but became a more popular and widespread beverage during the eighteenth century when its preparation and consumption gradually moved from public coffeehouses to private homes.[124] Tea was easy to prepare at home, it was economical for the tea leaves could be reused, and it was mildly addictive. Until 1833, all tea sold in England was Chinese,

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proletariat". On the other hand, she maintains that the decrease in drinking was part of a larger change in the concept of self and its relations to the surrounding world as well as changes in socialising patterns. (Marianna Adler, "From Symbolic Exchange to Commodity Consumption: Anthropological Notes on Drinking as a Symbolic Practice," *Drinking: Behavior and Belief in Modern History*, ed. Susanna Barrows and Robin Room, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, 386-7). Lilian Shiman notes that the temperance movement in the nineteenth century was linked with the idea of "work discipline" and the idea that "[d]rinking decreased the efficiency of the working classes" (Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade against Drink in Victorian England*, London: Macmillan Press, 1988, 2).

[120] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 11.

[121] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 532-533.

[122] Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures*, 54; Julie E. Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 11-14.

[123] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 22.

[124] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 4-5.

imported by the East India Company which had a monopoly on the trade with China. Fromer states that "the Chinese remained in control of the manufacture and exportation of Chinese tea" and when the tea plant was discovered in Assam and its cultivation began there, tea became part of the produce of the British Empire and thus gave Britain more control over the production of and commerce in tea. Fromer further points out that the introduction of tea grown in a territory which was part of the British Empire into the market gave the nineteenth-century tea industry tools for changing the image of tea: their "central strategy for procuring safe, secure sources of tea was to transform tea from a foreign commodity into a product of the British Empire."[125] On the other hand, Erika Rappaport notes that it is difficult to know how far the average British person would have been conscious about the origins of the products they consumed, including tea.[126]

Tea, as a necessity, could be found in all households, including the poorer ones. According to Fromer, tea as a commodity was used as a kind of ideological measurement of plenty in nineteenth-century tea histories which highlighted the working-class consumption of tea, as well as their taste, thus constructing an image of "relative well-being" as well as suggesting that "the poor enjoyed many of the same freedoms as the wealthier classes in England", first and foremost their freedom to participate in the consumer market.[127] Thus, if the poor could afford to purchase tea and even "have a great nicety of discrimination, preferring good Congou"[128] then they were doing quite well economically. Tea hence created an image of well-to-do domesticity and comfort, regardless of class; it provided not only physical but also mental comfort

[125] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 28.
[126] Erika Rappaport, "Packaging China: Foreign Articles and Dangerous Tastes in the Mid-Victorian Tea-Party," *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World*, ed. Frank Trentman (Oxford: Berg, 2006) 135.
[127] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 81. In addition to Sigmond, Fromer mentions, for example, John Sumner's *A Popular Treatise on Tea* (1836) and Samuel Day's *Tea: Its Mystery and History* (1878), 80.
[128] Sigmond, 38.

for the rattle of tea cups was "always a cheerful sound" (MB 171). Yet the reason why the poor were ready to spend a large part of their income on tea was not necessarily the wish to participate and belong to the common English tea-drinking nation. In *The Chemistry of Common Life* (1855) James Johnston suggests that the reason is physiological: tea helps to fill the stomach and thus less food is needed to feel satiated. He argues that tea "saves food—stands to a certain extent in the place of food—while at the same time it soothes the body and enlivens the mind."[129] It might fill the stomach, as Johnston notes, and in that sense replace food but in reality, although not injurious to physical and mental health as Cobbett argues, it has very little nutritional value. In addition to its refreshing properties, tea was popular because it created an illusion of a full warm meal. As Burnett notes, tea became necessity for the working-class poor because it added "warmth and comfort to cold, monotonous food."[130]

Unlike working-class foodways, working-class consumption of alcohol has attracted more attention. Susanna Barrows and Robin Room maintain that working-class consumption of alcohol has been far more often under scrutiny than middle- or upper-class habits of drinking because of issues of privacy: "The well-to-do had the luxury of privacy and elaborate etiquettes surrounding drinking and dining, and their consumption remained discreetly hidden from the public record".[131] According to Davidoff and Hall, in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, heavy drinking was part of the social life of males of all classes in all spheres of life, and "[c]ontracts were sealed with a drink", but by the mid-nineteenth century, "drunkenness in the middle ranks had

[129] James F. W. Johnston, *The Chemistry of Common Life*, vol 1, Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1855, 173. Johnston was an agricultural chemist, a lecturer at Durham University and one of the founders of British Science Association (founded in 1831). According to Johnston, the effects of tea on body and mind are due to a substance called "theine" which is now commonly called caffeine (170).
[130] Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 54.
[131] Susanna Barrows and Robin Room, Introduction, *Drinking: Behavior and Belief in Modern History*, ed. Susanna Barrows and Robin Room (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 7.

fallen markedly".[132] In nineteenth-century England, drinking large amounts or being drunk were not considered "respectable" behaviour anymore but something typical of "the lower strata of the [working] class, the outcasts and the slum-dwellers untouched by the forces of social progress."[133] Before the emergence of the idea of alcoholism as a disease at the end of the nineteenth century, heavy drinking was generally believed to be an indication of "moral failure or weakness of character."[134] There seems to have been a decline in especially wine consumption among the upper and middle classes in the nineteenth century which according to Burnett was part of the general change in the concept of proper behaviour among the polite society who began to consider "drinking to excess" a breach of etiquette.[135] Drinking became a class issue and Daniel Lewis notes that Victorian middle-class men "did not drink too much because that was the characteristic of working-class men" thus arguing that the ability and wish to control the alcohol intake made the difference between the drinking habits of the classes.[136] While public drinking became more stigmatised the middle-class use of alcohol became more and more private; Schivelbusch argues that "[a]lcohol … was domesticated. The middle-class citizen drank moderately, and he drank in a private circle (at home, in his club, or out amid a table of 'regulars'). In Victorian England stopping in at a pub became almost as scandalous as visiting a brothel".[137]

[132] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2002) 400.
[133] Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures*, 127.
[134] Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures*, 129.
[135] Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures*, 147-8.
[136] Daniel Lewis, "The Middle-Class Moderation of Food and Drink in *David Copperfield.*" *The Explicator*, 67.2 (Winter 2009) 79.
[137] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants*, transl. David Jacobson (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) 148.

Food as Gift

Giving gifts can be seen as a forger of social bonds: by giving and receiving a connection is created between the parties. In his classic study on gift exchange, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1923), the sociologist Marcel Mauss notes that gift exchange is a cyclical movement involving giving, taking, and reciprocating; in primitive societies this cyclical movement would often be a part of the social contract shrouded with obligation: not only "the obligation to repay gifts received … [but also] the obligation to give presents and the obligation to receive them"; hence his argument that gift is never free.[138] Theories of gift exchange often emphasise the role of a gift as social discourse and a means of creating and maintaining social relationships but gift exchange can also be considered an expression of power relationships. In *Sociology of Giving* (1999), Helmuth Berking points out that "[g]enerosity has connotations of status and power"[139] and in *The Logic of Practice* (1980), Pierre Bourdieu maintains that "the only recognized power – recognition, personal loyalty or prestige – is the one that is obtained by giving"; this power can be moral or it can be economic as acquired by lending money. Gifts, especially liberal ones, often generate and sustain "moral obligations and emotional attachments".[140] Berking argues that in gift exchange, the donor/recipient relationship is usually considered "hierarchical", implying the donor's superior position in the power relations: "taking is associated with weakness and giving with strength or physical superiority".[141] If one considers generosity in the form of philanthropy a one-way street, that is, the recipient of the gift is not expected to give back, at least anything material, then the

[138] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, transl. Ian Cunnison, 1923 (London: Cohen & West Ltd, 1969) 10-11.
[139] Helmuth Berking, *Sociology of Giving* (London: Sage, 1999) 38.
[140] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) 126.
[141] Berking, 66.

giver would, according to Berking, belong to a group defined by "[n]egative reciprocity", that is, a group "from which one can take without having to give."[142]

Marshall Sahlins categorises hospitality as a "putatively altruistic" act of giving which is characterised by "generalised reciprocity". The reciprocity is generalised in the sense that there are no expectations of immediate return of the gift nor is the counter-gift expected to match the first gift economically. Moreover, the counter-gift, here the act of hospitality, does not necessarily need to imitate the received gift but could be something that is essential to the giver of the gift at any given time and something the recipient is able to afford.[143] Yet hospitality can be seen as only partly altruistic for as Aafke Komter points out in "Women, Gifts and Power" (1996), hospitality and helping others are often acts that include the expectation of being helped in turn when needed.[144] Berking notes that gifts of food can be seen as a dimension of bonding rituals that derive from "brood-care behaviour" which is manifest in the parent-child feeding relationship.[145] Feeding one's 'brood' is a way to bond but it also expresses the superior-inferior relationship in which material reciprocity is not expected yet symbolic reciprocity in the form of gratitude and obedience are. It can be argued that this is how philanthropy works: charitable gifts of food express not only sympathy but also the wish to create a bond of one-sided dependence. Sharing food or giving gifts of food, or offering help in general within a community can be seen partly as a selfish action for which a counter-gift is expected.

In addition to maintaining social equilibrium, or expressing power relations, gift exchange can be seen as a connection between two individuals; it can be considered "an

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[142] Berking, 38.
[143] Marshall D. Sahlins, "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange," *Stone Age Economics* (London: Routledge, 1978) 185-205, rpt in *The Gift: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Aafke E. Komter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996) 31.
[144] Aafke E. Komter, "Women, Gifts and Power," *The Gift: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Aafke E. Komter, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996) 123.
[145] Berking, 66.

emotionally significant performance."[146] Barry Schwartz argues that "gift imposes an identity upon the giver as well as the receiver"; gifts often correspond with the giver's idea of the recipient and are chosen according to what the giver thinks the recipient would appreciate or desire. On the other hand, at the same time, a gift also reflects the identity the giver imagines or wishes to bestow on the recipient and by accepting the gift the recipient could be seen as accepting the giver's idea of the recipient's identity.[147] The ribbon Philip Hepburn gives to Sylvia Robson in *Sylvia's Lovers* is a love-token but it is also a reflection of Philip's hopeful image of Sylvia as his lover; his notion that the pattern of "the briar-rose (sweetness and thorns) seemed to be the very flower for her" (SL 126) also reflects his idea of her personality and at the same time defines her identity. His choice nevertheless bestows on him an identity as well, his thoughts on how "the soft, green ground on which the pink and brown pattern run, was just the colour to show off her complexion" (SL 126) reveals a surprising point of view for a male character yet Philip is a shop-keeper by profession and thus accustomed to evaluating colours and complexions. The gift given by Philip and received by Sylvia bestows on them both identities which Philip wishes them to have: two lovers. Ironically, Sylvia passes the ribbon on to Philip's rival, Charlie Kinraid, as a love-token.

Lupton argues that food is "the ultimate gift"; in addition to being physically consumed and digested, food is also heavily symbolic because of its psychological associations. Similar to gifts in general, gifts of food can express love and the wish to sustain social and individual bonds but they can also function as a tool to manipulate

[146] David Cheal, "'Showing Them You Love Them': Gift Giving and the Dialectic of Intimacy", *Sociological Review* 35.1 (1987): 150-169, rpt. in *The Gift: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Aafke E. Komter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996) 97.
[147] Barry Schwartz, "The Social Psychology of Gift," *American Journal of Sociology* 73 (1) 1967: 1-11, rpt. in *The Gift: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Aafke E. Komter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996) 70-1.

them.[148] Giving money to buy food would be less caring and less personal than giving food or sharing one's own meal. According to Lee Anne Fennell, food as a gift is more or less "illiquid", that is, it is not easy to convert food into money and as a perishable commodity it needs to be consumed as soon as possible. Money received as a gift, on the other hand, although not illiquid per se, is often "socially constructed" as illiquid; it is usually "earmarked for something special" and not meant for the purchase of daily necessities, for example. If a gift of money is given with the purpose of supporting somebody's daily life then it could be seen as charity. The earmarking thus serves as a means to make the difference between money as a gift and money as charity. [149] On the other hand, to understand food, for example, as a gift it needs to be somehow marked as one. David Cheal points out that "[g]ifts may be labelled as such verbally or … physically" and packages, wrapping, or ribbon, for example, work as a physical label; when the wrapping is removed, a gift becomes a commodity again.[150] Thus food, such as the fruit in *North and South* or the sausages in *Sylvia's Lovers* is understood as gifts because physically labelled with a basket in which they are presented.

Perspectives on Hunger

In *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment* (1993), a study on diverse aspects of self-starvation from hunger striking to anorexia, Maud Ellmann notes that "the meanings of starvation differ … according to the social context in which it is endured …. Hunger may be caused by anything from famine, war, revolution, disease, psychosis, dieting, or piety."[151] Yet it is not only the social context that determines the

[148] Lupton, 47-8.
[149] Lee Anne Fennell, "Unpacking the Gift: Illiquid Goods and Empathetic Dialogue," *The Question of the Gift: Essays Across Disciplines*, Ed. Mark Osteen (London: Routledge, 2002) 91-3.
[150] Cheal, 101.
[151] Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing and Imprisonment* (London: Virago Press, 1993) 4.

meanings of starvation but also the historical one. Intertwining social, cultural, and political history, the historian James Vernon's *Hunger: A Modern History* (2007) discusses the meanings of hunger and the hungry against the historical context, recording the change in the way hunger and starvation have been perceived during the past two hundred years: from a natural state induced by individual failing to humanitarian concern worthy of sympathy and finally to a political issue.[152] Vernon notes that still in the early nineteenth century, the hungry, like the poor, were seen as being responsible for their own condition; they were hungry because they were lazy and lacking in moral fibre and incapable of operating in a market economy.[153] Government acts such as the New Poor Law of 1834, the implication of which was that "only hunger could remoralize the poor, by teaching them the virtue of labor",[154] further emphasised the alleged connection between voluntary idleness and hunger by requiring hard labour in workhouses in exchange for financial aid and/or food.

The New Poor Law met with criticism and even political opposition and was nicknamed the Starvation Act by *The Times*.[155] One of the critics was Thomas Carlyle who in *Past and Present* (1843) calls workhouses "Poor-Law Prisons"[156] for the reason that the New Poor Law decreed that the poor could only receive relief on condition that they resided in workhouses. This rule had to be relaxed, though, for the number of poor kept surpassing the number of beds in workhouses and consequently the system of outdoor relief never ceased to exist. John Coveney notes in *Food, Morals and Meaning* (2000) that although workhouses were more or less otherwise left under the supervision of the individual parishes, the workhouse diet was regulated by directions provided by

[152] James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) 2-3.
[153] Vernon, 11-12.
[154] Vernon, 12.
[155] Vernon, 18.
[156] Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 1843, ed.Chris R. Vanden Bossche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 5.

the Poor Law Commission. The workhouse fare was not to surpass the minimum working-class diet, to ensure that only the poorest would be tempted to have recourse to relief, but in reality compared unfavourably with it to the extent that the food provided was sometimes inedible or the amount so insufficient that the inmates would eat the workhouse candles, as Coveney contends.[157] Perhaps the most famous fictive representation of a Victorian workhouse and the workhouse diet can be found in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837-9) where the orphaned Oliver commits a crime against inhumanity by demanding more food. The meagre and unpalatable workhouse diet had a "moral purpose"; it worked as a disciplinary tool to regimen both the bodies and the souls of the poor who were not only subservient to the workhouse rules but also not in control of their own life or their food consumption.[158] Like prisons, also workhouses disciplined the bodies of those deemed in need of reform. Tellingly, in *Mary Barton* the unemployed John Barton spurns outdoor relief, refusing to "apply for relief from the Guardians' relieving office" (MB 133) despite being on the brink of starvation; his refusal and his declaration that he does not want "charity" (MB 133) but work and thus a chance to earn his money characterises him as someone with enough industriousness and integrity to refuse relief.

Although targets of charitable Christian work, the hungry were deemed not quite human; they were seen as "figures of opprobrium and disgust, not sympathy" and hunger itself was considered "either a natural condition or an inevitable and necessary one, beyond the government of man."[159] It was thought that helping the hungry, and the poor, would make them more dependent on relief, and encourage them to remain

[157] John Coveney, *Food, Morals and Meaning: The Pleasure and Anxiety of Eating* (London: Routledge, 2000) 81.
[158] Coveney, 87.
[159] Vernon, 2. Louise A. Tilly nevertheless argues that hunger was understood as a phenomenon caused by human rather than divine actions at least as early as in the seventeenth century (Louise A. Tilly, "Food Entitlement, Famine, and Conflict," *Hunger and History: The Impact of Changing Food Production and Consumption Patterns on Society*, eds. Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb (Cambridge: Cambridge Unversity Press, 1985, 135).

dependent and shun employment. Some political economists such as Thomas Malthus, who in *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) argued that population increase will always exceed that of food production, saw hunger and starvation as necessary checks on population growth of the poor, in addition to the check of discouraging them to marry and procreate. As "the most dreadful resource of nature", famine and especially solutions to avoid it were considered somehow out of the control of human society.[160] Starvation to death was seen as a natural, and providential, way of limiting the population growth. On the other hand, in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) Adam Smith considered hunger and famine the outcomes of human actions, first and foremost of the prevention of free trade.[161]

There was nevertheless a change in the way hunger and the hungry were perceived, a change which led to "the humanitarian discovery of hunger"[162] during the mid-nineteenth century. Hunger became newsworthy; journalists' reports of "personal stories about helpless starving children, the anguish of a mother unable to make ends meet to feed her family … helped [to] establish the moral innocence of the hungry as victims of forces beyond their control."[163] The accounts, whether of the Irish Famine of 1840, which many neo-Malthusians saw as an act of providence, or the Lancashire Cotton Famine of 1861-65, or the famines in India, sought to confirm the right of the hungry to sympathy. The change was a part of a wider phenomenon emerging from the eighteenth century onward, a phenomenon that Thomas W. Laqueur calls "humanitarian narrative". He contends that these kinds of narratives rely on factual, or 'real', representations of bodily states and sensations in their attempt to establish a bond

[160] Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 1798 (London: The Electric Book Company, 2001) 54.
[161] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1776 (London: The Electric Book Company, 2001) 708-9.
[162] Vernon, 17.
[163] Vernon, 18.

between human subjects through association, at the same time seeking to reveal not only the chain of causality producing human suffering but also the possibilities of human intervention in both its causes and effects.[164] The humanitarian narrative began to gain momentum with the rise of the cult of sensibility and sentimentalism one important principle of which was the "notion that human beings are innately sympathetic".[165] Treatises on moral philosophy, such as Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, that promoted the idea of humans' innate benevolence and the importance of fellow-feeling in constructing a morally sound society helped to develop not only social consciousness but also a specific culture of exaggerated forms of sympathy and benevolence. In the eighteenth century, the readiness to feel sympathy, and the feelings of sensibility, became the signs not only of good breeding but also of virtue and morality. The late eighteenth-century sentimental novel, or the novel of sensibility, reflected these ideas by aiming to move the readers by representations of distress and sorrow, preferably on the part of the virtuous characters, natural beauty and feelings of the sublime.

By the 1840s, the literature of sensibility had more or less vanished but traces of it can be seen in the numerous sentimental scenes in Victorian fiction as well as in the Victorian melodrama. The influence can also be seen in what Mary Lenard calls "sentimentalist discourse"[166] that the social problem novels of the 1840s, including *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, use. The use of the humanitarian narrative, and thus the sentimental and sympathy, in nineteenth-century fiction was one of the ways to affect readers and to manipulate their reactions. One of the most recurrent ways to

[164] Thomas W. Laqueur, "Bodies, Details, and Humanitarian Narrative," *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 176-178.
[165] R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974) 30.
[166] Mary Lenard, *Preaching Pity: Dickens, Gaskell, and Sentimentalism in Victorian Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999) 115.

evoke emotional response was death and deathbed scenes and Margaret Holubetz notes that it was especially the deaths of innocent children or "the sinners" that offered a way to touch the readers' emotions.[167] The representations of hunger and the hungry poor in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, for example, can thus be seen as part of a development in both thought and narrative technique which perhaps is slightly more tentative in *Mary Barton* than in *North and South*.

From moral failure to the concern of humanitarians, hunger came to be considered first and foremost a socio-political as well as an economic issue in the twentieth century. In *Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (1982) Amartya Sen considers hunger and starvation social and political issues. He argues that "starvation … is a function of entitlements and not food availability as such";[168] it is about entitlements caused not by the lack of edible commodities but the uneven distribution of them.[169] Sen contends that a person starving is either unable to access food or has made a choice not to eat though food, or means to purchase it, might be available.[170] Similarly, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* Engels considers hunger a socio-political issue, arguing that starvation in nineteenth-century England was an outcome of "social warfare", caused by unevenly distributed wealth and power. He notes how members of the working class are left to their own devices to survive the best they can: if unemployed, for example, they can steal to procure food or "starve, in which case the police will take care that [they do] so in a quiet and inoffensive manner."[171]

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[167] Margarete Holubetz, "Death-bed Scenes in Victorian Fiction", *English Studies*, 67.1 (1986) 17.
[168] Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) 7.
[169] Sen, 1.
[170] Sen, 45.
[171] Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (London: The Electric Book Company, 1998) 81.

When the striking workers in *Mary Barton* and *North and South* profess to be ready to "clem … to death" (NS 133) rather than accept the starvation wages offered by their employers they are choosing not to use their meagre entitlements but to go on hunger strike instead. To voluntarily refuse food is a form of self-starvation which has been practised through the ages, from "fasting saints to anorexic girls", to borrow from Walter Vandereycken and Ron van Deth's book title.[172] They argue that although hunger strikes as protest, especially for political reasons, did not occur frequently before the twentieth century, refusal to eat as a "struggle for power of someone who feels desperate or powerless" was not unknown before that.[173] According to Vernon, the hunger strikes of the imprisoned suffragettes at the beginning of the twentieth century were the first instances of hunger striking "as a vehicle of political protest" in Britain and its colonies, soon followed by political hunger strikes in Ireland and India.[174]

Apart from its socio-political dimension, hunger, like food consumption, is also a phenomenon which is closely linked with concepts such as self and the other, inside and outside, human and animal; hunger is a physical need and alleviating hunger an act that ensures physical existence. As a bodily appetite hunger has often been seen as a reflection of animality, from Adam Smith who saw it as an act "we share in common with the brutes"[175] to William L. Sargant who points out in *Economy of the Labouring Classes* (1857) that food is one of the things needed to "satisfy our bodily needs", reminding the reader that "[t]he cravings of hunger … are common to us with the lower animals".[176] Hunger is a reminder of our embodied existence and the fragile boundary between a human and an animal but it also offers an unparalleled field in which to

[172] Walter Vandereycken and Ron van Deth, *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls: The History of Self-Starvation* (London: The Athlone Press, 1990).
[173] Vandereycken and van Deth, 74-5.
[174] Vernon, 43. Vernon notes that there is an old Irish tradition of self-starvation called Senchus Mor "according to which a victim of debt or injustice could fast on the threshold of the house who wronged him, until a settlement was reached" (62). See also Ellmann, 12-13.
[175] Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 34.
[176] William Lucas Sargant, *Economy of the Labouring Classes* (London: Simpkin Marshall, 1857) 263.

exercise one's power over physicality: by denying hunger one can gain control over one's body and over one's animality. Hunger is a state in which humans approach the state of being animals; according to Julia Kristeva it is one of "those fragile states where man [sic] strays on the territories of *animal*" in which "abject" resides.[177] Pierre Bourdieu suggests that hunger can be seen as "the basely material vulgarity of those who indulge in the immediate satisfactions of food and drink", a vulgarity which the rules and regulations of the middle-class food consumption aim at denying by turning a meal into "a social ceremony".[178]

Hunger for food is something that defines us as biological entities yet hunger denotes also other physical necessities such as sexual needs and desires, or mental ones: one can hunger for food but also for love or for social esteem. In fact, the philosopher Raymond Tallis argues in *Hunger* (2008) that hunger should be considered outside the sphere of "biologism", that is, outside the fact that hunger is solely the product of, and is produced by, the quintessential animality of human beings. He emphasises the "yawning gulf between ourselves and beasts" in matters such as accomplishments, treatment of others, and managing hunger, arguing that to better understand our hungers it is essential to consider humans out of the context of "biological roots". In a somewhat Platonian tone, Tallis distinguishes between the basic bodily hungers and the non-biological "higher hungers", and thus between the body and the mind, or the soul.[179] Traditionally subjectivity and understanding have been classified as something abstract, and bodily experience as something separate and basically different from the process of thinking and reasoning. Plato, for example, places "the knowledge gained by the soul

[177] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, transl. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 12. Italics original.
[178] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 196.
[179] Raymond Tallis, *Hunger* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008) 2-4. What Tallis considers the crucial difference between a human being and an animal is the fact that animals do not have self-consciousness: "[t]hey have no sense of self " (82).

(abstract thought)" above the knowledge gained "through the body (sense perception)."[180] Yet the supremacy of the mind has its opponents and in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) Merleau-Ponty suggests that subjectivity has bodily basis and our experience of the world and our existence in it are entirely embodied.[181] Thus also our hungers would finally be the product of our biological body, regardless of their variety. The term *hunger* meant want of food long before it became to be used in the meaning of desire for other things as well, and the way we linguistically use the term *hunger* still emphasises the link between body and mind.[182] In *Sylvia's Lovers*, the use of hunger to denote love and sexual desire has a prominent role for Philip Hepburns' whole existence is defined by his hunger for Sylvia Robson and her refusal to give him what he hungers for.

Metaphors are used to explain and to translate abstract or complicated phenomena in life, phenomena such as life itself or death, or emotions such as love or anger, that are perhaps not comprehensible to us; hence the use of expressions such as *to starve for love* or *to hunger for love*, or the idea that *love is food*. According to the cognitive approach to meaning, language cannot necessarily be separated from our consciousness and our experience of the world influences the language we speak, and the linguistic system we use in general. Even if signs would be arbitrary, as Saussure argues, and we call a chair a 'chair' only because it has been decided that the word 'chair' denotes an object we can sit on, the reasons we use certain language is necessarily not arbitrary. Eve Sweetser notes how words denoting emotions, for instance, often originate "from words referring to physical actions or sensations

[180] Jules R. Bemborad, "Self-Starvation Through the Ages: Reflections on the Pre-History of Anorexia Nervosa," *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 19.3 (1996) 219.
[181] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) 206.
[182] *Oxfrod English Dictionary* gives *hunger* the date of c 825 for the meaning of want of food and 1548 for the figurative meaning of desire ("hunger, n.").

accompanying the relevant emotions, or to the bodily organs affected by those physical reactions." The heart is thus considered the emblem of love partly because the emotion of love literally makes one's heart beat faster due to the affect it has on the heart's blood-pumping. [183]

Raymond Tallis notes that hunger, or desire, for another human being may develop into "a raging, gnawing hunger, a hunger that consumes us from within"; it may overshadow everything else and become the controlling power of one's actions and one's life in general.[184] Analogously, unappeased hunger for another human being, like that for food, may well lead to physical wasting through the loss of appetite; love is seen as nourishing food and the metaphor to *starve for love* is realised in physical symptoms.[185] Hunger is thus a phenomenon that affects human beings both physically and mentally; one can hunger for food or for love. In *Mary Barton*, discussed in the next chapter, hunger and starvation are social problems; they are first and foremost physical phenomena which nevertheless affect both the bodies and the minds of the starving characters.

[183] Eve Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 28. Sweetser claims that the importance of the body for our thinking is obvious in the fact that "bodily experience is a source of vocabulary for our psychological states, but not the other way around" (30).
[184] Tallis, 76-7.
[185] Geroge Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd edition, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 242. Lakoff argues that "[t]he unconscious mind makes use of our unconscious system of conventional metaphor, sometimes to express psychological states in terms of physical symptoms." He points out how people meeting with difficulties may realise the metaphor *difficulties are burdens*, for example, in the way they walk, as if carrying a concrete burden (243).

3. *Mary Barton*

Hunger: "Clemming is a quiet death"

This chapter begins with a discussion on the representations of hunger and the hungry in *Mary Barton* where the uneven distribution of edible commodities is evident when the delegates of the Manchester mill-workers travel to London to submit a petition and are abundantly fed at the London public house they stay: "Th' morning of taking our petition we had such a spread of breakfast … I suppose they thought we wanted putting in heart. There were mutton, kidneys, and sausages, and broiled ham, and fried beef and onions" (MB 114). The delegates have no appetite, though, for the "food stuck in their throats when they thought o' them at home, wives and little ones, as had … nought to eat" (MB 114-5). What the delegates, and the readers, thus learn is that entitlement to food varies: the working-class poor may starve in Manchester, not because there is no food available, but because the food available is not in their reach due to unemployment and insufficient means, in other words, they are not economically entitled to "command enough food".[186] The lack of entitlement is manifest especially in areas that suffer most from the economic depression where the likes of John Barton can only look at food but not eat it: "Hungry…, he stood at one of the shop windows where all edible luxuries are displayed; haunches of venison, Stilton cheeses, moulds of jelly—all appetising sights to the common passer-by" (MB 25). The mill-owners, on the other hand, having money also have "entitlement" and are thus able to go in to the shop and come out "loaded with purchases" (MB 25).

[186] Sen, 45.

Mary Douglas argues that as "the prime necessity", food is one of the commodities that is "bought in the same quantities regardless of changes in prices or incomes."[187] There are, however, situations in which the amount of food purchased diminishes drastically when income drops, and since the need for food remains constant regardless of the amount of money available, a situation such as this leads into starvation. The narrator in *Mary Barton* explains how during "the terrible years 1839, 1840, and 1841" (MB 96) the starving poor were "sinking under the pressure of want and despair into a premature grave" (MB 97) because their earnings could not match the rising prices of food. According to Engel's law, the lower the income the larger proportion of it is used on food,[188] but in *Mary Barton* the income of the unemployed working-class characters is so low, or it is even non-existent, that it is not the question of how much of their income they can use but rather whether they can spend money on food at all.

When criticising the mill-owners' reluctance to fully acknowledge their plight, the working-class characters are recurrently shown to rely on the emerging humanitarian interest by using hunger and starvation as the measure of their suffering. When the more conciliatory working-class character George Wilson tells John Barton how Mr Carson, one of the mill-owners, had expressed his worry about his own financial situation and how he, too, has to "be very careful in [his] expenditure during these bad times" (MB 74), and George Wilson interprets this as an indication of the fact that "th' masters suffer too" (MB 74), John Barton comments on the mill-owners' 'suffering' by asking if they have seen "a child o' their'n die for want o' food?" (MB

[187] Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 1996) 68-9.
[188] Engel's law is named after a nineteenth-century German statistician Ernst Engel.

74).[189] From John Barton's point of view, "bad times" and loss of income signify hunger and starvation simply because food is the commodity on which he spends most money and when he earns less, or nothing, the amount of food he is able to purchase will consequently be less or nothing as well. On the other hand, Mr Carson and the other mill-owners can still sit at a "well-spread breakfast-table" and consume "their nicely prepared food" (MB 76), even when forced to close their factories for a while when "trade was very slack" (MB 63), because proportionately they use less of their total income on food. Even if their income decreases, they can still buy enough food although they have to limit their spending in general. It is also clear that the concepts of necessity/luxury have a different meaning for the representatives of the two parties for when the working-class children "clamoured" (MB 68) for bread, Mr Carson's young daughter persuades her father to buy her an expensive rose because it is "one of her necessaries" (MB 78) without which "[l]ife was not worth having" (MB 78).

When John Barton refers to one's own children starving to death, it is an indication of how the narrative seeks to personalise hunger; instead of an abstract phenomenon caused by reckless behaviour and failing morals, hunger is a plague that literally kills, even children who cannot be seen as responsible for their own condition. By presenting the 'respectable' working class struggle in vain to feed their families, the narrative exploits the nascent humanitarian interest in hunger and the hungry that

[189] Melissa Schaub calls Wilson's sympathetic stance an example of "paralyz[ing]" sympathy: the narrative places the masters in the position of fellow victims thus rendering the workers "morally unable to take action against their own victimization." She argues that the novel is meant not solely to elicit the sympathies of middle-class readers but teach working-class readers to realise that the masters' need sympathy as well, and thus paralyse them from taking action against the masters; sympathy is used as a "tool to discipline" the working-class characters as well as their real-life counterparts (Melissa Schaub, "Sympathy and Discipline in *Mary Barton*", *Victorian Newsletter*106 (Fall 2004), 15). This attempt to share the position of victim between the masters and the workers is of course also manifest in the ultimate remedy for the social ills offered by the novel: the mutual understanding between the different parties. Similarly, in *North and South*, when the working-class Bessy Higgins, who is dying of consumption, suspects that the middle-class Margaret Hale has "never known want or care" (NS 135), Margaret, whose mother is seriously ill, answers that "Have I not care? Do I not know anxiety, though I go about well-dressed, and have food enough?" (NS 136).

Vernon sees as part of the change in how the hungry were perceived in the nineteenth century. When reporting on "wailing children asking in vain for enough of food" (MB 24) or on how children's "little voices are getting too faint and weak to cry aloud wi' hunger" (MB 220) the narrative utilises ingredients of what Laqueur calls humanitarian narrative; starving children would engender associative sympathy. The parents' desperation is expressed by one of the mill workers who in a low murmur tells that he has "seen a father who had killed his child rather than let it clem before his eyes" (MB 220). Although a reflection of extreme hopelessness, and meant to articulate the starving workers' agony, the character's words also unintentionally evoke unsympathetic associations. Many of the working classes belonged to a burial club; by paying a small fee regularly to the club the members would get money for their, or their family memebers', funeral. There were allegations that the system was abused and that parents would either let their children die or even kill them to receive the funeral money.[190] Thus the desperate deed of the parent could easily be interpreted as a mercenary act rather than an act of mercy.

Hunger can be the result of a situation where society is not able to provide work and means of livelihood to all its members: there might be food available but it is unattainable for part of the population. It can nevertheless be argued that John Barton's hunger is also the result of ideological assumptions: his inability to satisfy his and his

[190] For example, in 1845, a Commission Report states that in areas of "a bad sanatory condition, ―a term generally synonymous with a low moral state,―that we observed those appalling facts which lead to the conclusion, that infanticides, either by wilful neglect or by direct intention, are perpetrated in order to procure the burial-money paid on the death of the child (Walter Francis Montagu Douglas Scott, *Second Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts*, vol 1, London: William Clowes and Sons, 1845, 472). In *Past and Present*, Carlyle mentions a case in which the parents allegedly killed some of their children for burial money, driven to it by utter want and desperation (7-8). The legend about the father killing his child rather than seeing him or her starve is perhaps also an allusion to Dante's *Inferno* where a character called Count Ugolino is imprisoned with his children; they are all starving and before the children die they ask their father to eat them after their death so that he would be fed. Carlyle also makes a reference to the story of Ugolino (*Past and Present*, 8). He further refers to the possibility of (symbolic) cannibalistic acts engendered by starvation and anarchy when he notes how "fathers and mothers, in Stockport hunger-cellars, begin to eat their children" (267).

family's hunger would be the result of his failure to fulfil the economic and social requirements of a 'decent' human being. It was a widely held assumption, even among the dissenting religious group of Unitarians, to which Gaskell belonged, who in the early nineteenth century were considered quite progressive in their reformist ideas of social and political issues, that poverty was largely self-generated, that is, it was the result of the immoral, weak and even criminal character of the poor and not of the circumstances. Although this idea began to change slowly in the 1840s, still in 1841, the Mission Committee ignored the reports of home visitors of the consequences of unemployment still contending that the misery and the suffering of the working classes were due to lack of morality and improvidence.[191] Since the hungry were seen as responsible for their own condition, hunger, too, would be the result of the individual's failure as a human being, an ideological assumption that would make it much easier to avoid social and economical changes.

In *Mary Barton* the narrator implies that part of the economic problems of the likes of John Barton are caused by their unsuccessful command of pecuniary resources:

> [W]ith child-like improvidence, good times will often dissipate his grumbling, and make him forget all prudence and foresight. … [John Barton] spent all he got with the confidence (you may also call it improvidence)…[a]nd when his master suddenly failed, and all hands in the mill were turned back,…Barton had only a few shillings to rely on. (MB 24)

[191] John Seed, "Unitarianism, Political Economy and the Antinomies of Liberal Culture in Manchester, 1830-50," *Social History* 7:1 (January 1982) 17-8. Elsewhere, Seed argues that despite the Unitarians' radicalism in certain areas of life, the early nineteenth-century Unitarianism was very conscious of the social division and even keen to enforce the boundaries between social classes, also within the movement (John Seed, "Theologies of Power: Unitarianism and the Social Relations of Religious Discourse, 1800-50," *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-Century Towns*, ed. R. J. Morris, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986, 119). The Domestic Mission was a Unitarian organisation established to provide charity and education for the working classes in the form of visitors to their homes. The visitors would report their visits to the Mission Committee. Ultimately the Domestic Mission, like other philanthropic organisations, can be seen as a way to control and regulate the working classes, in addition to providing help.

The narrator equates John Barton's abilities to plan his life with that of a child unable to fully understand the importance of financial prudence and thus shifts part of the responsibility for his financial situation onto his shoulders: it is implied that the reason why he cannot afford to provide his ill son with "good nourishment … [and] generous living" when even "the commonest food in the house would not furnish one little meal" (MB 25) is partly the result of his own 'childish' improvidence with financial matters. Comparable ideas were expressed in publications targeted at a working-class readership; in 1848, *The Family Economist*, for example, claimed that "[a]mong the working classes, large numbers live from hand to mouth, buying things just as they want them, without thinking of providing for to-morrow."[192] Similarly, working-class diet and especially cooking skills are found inadequate; the magazine belittles the argument that the poor "can get very little food to cook" and claims that with "an improved system of cookery" even that small amount will give more nourishment.[193] What this suggests is that working-class starvation, for example, would not be caused by the lack of food but by the mismanagement of food resources by the working class itself. The idea that the cooking skills among the industrial poor were often considered less than adequate is enforced in *Mary Barton* when the working-class Mrs Wilson confesses how she did not know "how to cook a potato" (MB 139) when she got married after spending her childhood and youth working in a factory. She overboils the potatoes and they end up an inedible "nasty brown mess" (MB 139). Sumangala Bhattacharya claims that the potato is the ultimate "food of starvation" in *Mary Barton*, as in the 1840s social problem novels in general, reflecting its status as a working-class

[192] *The Family Economist; A Penny Monthly Magazine Devoted to the Moral, Physical, and Domestic Improvement of the Industrious Classes*, vol 1, London: Groombridge & Sons, 1848, 29.
[193] *The Family Economist*, 10.

staple.[194] Nevertheless, I would argue that it is bread, along with oatmeal, that is the staple food of the starving characters in *Mary Barton* that they "clamour" (MB 68) for and consume to the bitter end.

The fact that hunger and starvation are loaded concepts in the narrative is manifest in the way they are linked in the novel with industrial action and the budding trade union movement. They become weapons used by the workers against the employers; if the suffering workers are "dumb" (MB xxxvi) as Gaskell argues in her Preface to the novel, and thus do not have a voice, they have to find other ways to articulate their needs, and hunger and starvation become part of the dialogue between the employees and the employers. When the workers are offered lower wages than they can accept they see this as an unacceptable behaviour on the part of the employers who are seen as "taking advantage of their workpeople being almost starved" (MB 201). The workers believe that the mill-owners are using their hunger as an economic pawn and therefore turn the tables on the employers, deciding to use their physical suffering to further their cause: "they would starve entirely rather than come into such terms. … [t]hey would fold their hands and sit idle, and smile at the masters, whom even in death they could baffle. With Spartan endurance they determined to let the employers know their power, by refusing to work" (MB 201). In a situation where they actually have not much choice, the workers decide to twist the meaning of their compulsory starvation and address it as if it would be voluntary. The strike that ensues is a form of hunger strike, and starvation becomes not only a sign of resistance but also of power; it reflects the fact that the workers' bodies are finally the only thing they can control and over which they have power.

[194] Sumangala Bhattacharya, "Badly-Boiled Potatoes and Other Crises," *Consuming Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century: Narratives of Consumption, 1700-1900*, eds. Tamara S. Wagner and Narin Hassan (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010) 5, 15.

Self-starvation as such is already a form of communication but as Ellmann notes, for hunger strike to be understood as "protest" it needs to be accompanied with words[195] and the workers' meeting with the mill-owners in *Mary Barton* fulfils this requirement because it gives them the chance to verbally present and clarify their case. The decision to starve to death rather than work on "Starvation Prices" (MB 203) becomes nevertheless a choice between "vitriol and starvation" (MB 223) for those unemployed and starving poor who are induced to come to Manchester after hearing of the mill-owners' search for replacements for the strikers. The "half-starved looking men" (MB 202) become the victims of the trade union action against the strike-breakers, beaten and even having vitriol thrown on them. Their choice not to starve to death becomes a choice to be physically assaulted, or being even killed. The drastic measures attributed to the members of the trade union reflect the often dubious reputation and distrust it enjoyed among the upper and middle classes.[196] In the novel, this point of view is implicitly supported by the working-class Job Legh in whose opinion "half a loaf is better than no bread. I would work for low wages rather than sit idle and starve" (MB 232). He nevertheless points out that he is not really given the choice because he is forced to follow the decisions made by the trade union: "comes the Trades' Union, and says, 'Well, if you take the half-loaf, we'll worry you out of your life. Will you be clemmed, or will you be worried?' Now clemming is a quiet death, and worrying isn't, so I choose clemming, and come into th' Union. But I'd wish they'd leave me free, if I am a fool" (MB 232). The trade union is portrayed as an oppressive institution the membership of which actually increases Job Legh's hunger and starvation and makes him unable to decide on his life himself. Like the strike-breakers coming in

[195] Ellmann, 18.
[196] According to Brantlinger, it was the violent measures taken against the strike-breakers that gave the trade union its reputation for being a tyranny in the early Victorian era. He argues that Gaskell, for example, could sympathise with the trade union measures as long as they were not "directed toward the guiltless poor" (42).

from the surrounding countryside, he too has to make the choice between eating and starving, between hostile aggression and silent death.[197]

If the meaning of hunger and starvation varies according to the cultural and social context, so does the expression of it, also linguistically. Although starvation is present in *Mary Barton* the narrator often avoids the use of the actual word when reporting the fates of the working-class poor. Some characters are "past hunger" (MB 68), or "hunger-stamped" (MB 98), children "die for want of food" (MB 74) and John Barton's "mother had died from absolute want of the necessaries of life" (MB 24), in other words, she had starved to death. In some cases the expression 'starve to death' gains a different meaning: when one of the middle-class Carsons' servants complains about how he is often forced to wait in the carriage for the family members, exposed to the elements, he confesses that he often goes and sits in the inn and has a drink because "[f]lesh and blood can't sit to be starved to death on a coach-box, waiting for folks as don't know their own mind" (MB 76). The hyperbole 'starve to death' is commonly used in the meaning 'extremely hungry' but here the character is using 'to starve to death' in its other hyperbolic and now mainly obsolete meaning of being benumbed with cold.[198] Thus for the Carsons' servant starving means a different thing than it does to the poor mill-workers and it is only the context that reveals the difference. V.N. Vološinov contends that all communicating, including giving utterance to a need such as hunger, is "socially oriented", that is, the verbal expression of the inner sensation of hunger, for example, is shaped by its context: who is addressing whom in which

[197] David Thiele argues that the character of Job Legh with his interest in natural history and his moderate and conciliatory political views can be seen as "a poster boy for a vision of social stability built on the values of the liberally educated" (David Thiele, "'That There Brutus': Elite Culture and Knowledge Diffusion in the Industrial Novels of Elizabeth Gaskell," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35.2 2007, 275).

[198] According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'to starve' in the meaning "die of exposure to cold" is now used only in northern dialect and 'to starve to death' is now mainly obsolete although used in some dialects. "starve, v.".

situation.[199] According to him, "the hungry person's general social standing as well as … the immediate circumstances of the experience" determine the way hunger is both expressed and understood.[200] How the expression is understood depends thus on the social position of both the speaker and the addressee, and their social relationship. If the addressee's social standing differs from that of the speaker's there is a chance that the speaker's intention is missed by the addressee.

Sometimes the actual word used blurs the meaning as happens in *Mary Barton*, in which hunger is recurrently linguistically expressed by using a Lancashire dialect word *to clem* for the standard English *to starve*. The word *to clem* is only used in the narrative in reference to the working-class characters and the fact that Gaskell felt the need to 'translate' the word in a footnote as "to starve with hunger"(MB 37) shows that the word would be foreign to most readers. Numerous other words, mostly Lancashire dialect words, are translated and explained in the footnotes to *Mary Barton*, and usually the explanations include a reference to the mostly Anglo-Saxon origins and history of the word as well as quotes from various writers which serve to justify the dialect's true Englishness. Jane Spencer notes that the characters' use of dialect is not meant to give "comic effect" but to give voice to the working classes in the linguistic sense.[201] The use of dialect words and especially the need to explain them to the readers can also be seen as a realist convention and as an attempt to anchor the narrative in a certain kind of reality. They bring 'local colour' to the narrative as do the detailed descriptions of working-class habits, habitations, and traditions and all this helps to create a working-class culture for the presumably ignorant middle-class readers to contemplate. This

[199] V.N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, transl. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik, (New York: Seminar Press, 1973) 86.
[200] Vološinov, 87.
[201] Jane Spencer, "*Mary Barton* and Thomas Carlyle," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 2 (1988), 4. For more on Gaskell's use of language and dialect see Marjorie Stone, "Bakhtinian Polyphony in *Mary Barton*; Class, Gender, and the Textual Voice," *Dickens Studies Annual* 20 (1991): 175-200. Stone argues that Gaskell's use of Lancashire dialect "subverts the hegemony of middle-class discourse"(177).

creation nevertheless serves not only as a conviction that the working classes are worthy of respect and sympathy of the middle classes but it further emphasises the social and cultural otherness of the working-class characters. The use of a dialect expression for *to starve* can be seen as a token of appreciation of the Mancunian working-class culture intended to be appreciated by the readers as well. Nevertheless, the use of a word unknown to most of the readers forces them to see the world from an unfamiliar point of view: the word has a defamiliarising effect. From communication point of view, the use of an unfamiliar word to express hunger thus undermines the intention of creating understanding between the different social classes simply because the word *to clem* does not necessarily mean the same thing to the readers as it does to the characters.

To state the terms on which they would be willing to return to work, the striking workers request a meeting with the employers. Although the "lank, ragged, dispirited, and famine-stricken" (MB 216) workers' delegates stand in front of the mill-owners with their "shrunk limbs" (MB 214), the mill-owners are described as being merely annoyed by their "ragged" appearances (MB 214). Despite the physical and verbal expressions of their hunger, the workers' delegates fail to make their starvation understood by the mill-owners. Instead, their hunger is converted into a caricature drawn by Harry Carson, one of the mill-owners' representatives; inspired by Shakespeare's play *1 Henry IV*, and accompanied by "a hasty quotation from the fat knight's well known speech" (MB 216) the drawing uses the hungry bodies to erase the palpable reality of hunger and removes it into the world of images and non-reality. As Joanne Wilkes points out, the mill-owners' amused appreciation of the likeness of the characters implies their inability to correctly interpret Falstaff, who is "a 'fat knight' amid half-starved men", and consequently their own role. She argues that the mill-owners' seeming misinterpretation of the play is an intentional narrative choice; while

expected to recognise the allusion the middle- and upper-class readers are also expected to recognise the mill-owners' failure to see the parallelism between Falstaff's treatment of his starving recruits and the treatment of their starving employees.[202] David Ellison contends that due to the general failure of the middle class to actually visualise the poor, the working-class starvation and the emaciated bodies become mere "material for aggressive, if not homicidal ridicule."[203] While this is true, it seems that it is more the question of *how* they are visualised: whether as starving but deserving human beings or as comic characters. In a metaphorical sense, the starving, shrinking bodies of the working-class poor nevertheless hover on the brink of becoming literally invisible; their expressions of hunger and starvation either misunderstood or not understood at all.

Michie notes how in *Mary Barton* "Elizabeth Gaskell mentions at times that Mary Barton is 'clemming,' but never depicts her hunger with the same detailed accuracy that marks her descriptions of interiors or of children dying. Mary watches her father grow mad and murderous through want of food; she herself grows only a little thinner and paler."[204] That Mary Barton's starvation does not reach the same dimensions as her father's does has not so much to do with her being a female character but rather with the fact that she is a working one. Employed as a dressmaker she is "secure of two meals a day at Miss Simmonds'" (MB 131), and therefore it can be argued that she actually eats more often than her unemployed father does. If being a proper woman in nineteenth-century fiction meant effacing the body and denying both "hunger and work"[205], as Michie contends, then Mary Barton can be seen as failing to fulfil the requirements of the proper womanhood for she both works and hungers in the

[202] Joanna Wilkes, "'Have at the Masters'?: Literary Allusions in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*," *Studies in the Novel* 39.2 (Summer 2007) 153-4.
[203] David Ellison, "Glazed Expression: *Mary Barton*, Ghosts and Glass," *Studies in the Novel* 36.4 (Winter 2004) 485-6.
[204] Michie, *The Flesh Made Word*, 12-13.
[205] Michie, The *Flesh Made Word*, 9.

novel, not only for food but also for action and at some point Mary even tells the sailor Will Wilson that "I wish I were a boy, I'd go to sea with you" (MB 226). The narrator describes how Mary and her friend Margaret, "the hungry girls" (MB 32) eat with relish Alice Wilson's "clap-bread and bread-and-butter" (MB 32), and when Margaret lends her money out of her earnings as a singer, Mary purchases food and "the father and daughter sat down to a meal they thought almost extravagant. It was so long since they had had enough to eat" (MB 168-9).

Mary's approach to hunger and eating seems very pragmatic for even when emotionally shaken she is able to think of food and eating: "Her head ached with dizzying violence …. She looked for food, but there was nothing but a little raw oatmeal in the house: still, although it almost choked her, she ate some of this, knowing from experience, how often headaches were caused by long fasting" (MB 290). The description of Mary's hunger further contests Michie's contention that depictions of female hunger are absent from *Mary Barton*. According to Athena Vrettos, in the nineteenth century, especially upper- and middle-class women's headaches were considered to be "emotional and mental" rather than physical by nature.[206] It is implied that Mary's headache is caused by hunger and thus has a somatic source, an implication which would further signal her working-class status. On the other hand, the middle-class Mrs Carson's headaches are implied to be mental or emotional if not even hypochondriac. The servants comment on how Mrs Carson and the family's former governess used to "quarrel which had the worst headaches; it was that Miss Jenkins left for; she would not give up having bad headaches, and missis could not abide any one to

[206] Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 14, 23. As so many other female health issues, headaches too were often considered to be caused by "a disordered condition of the uterus"(S. Mason, *The Philosophy of Female Health: Being an Inquiry into Its Connection with, and Dependence upon, the Due Performance of the Uterine Functions; with Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Treatment of Female Disorders in General*, London: H. Hughes, 1845, 19). According to Mason, the majority of women's health problems are caused by the uterus (1).

have ‘em but herself” (MB 76). Mrs Carson’s possibly feigned or at least exaggerated regular headaches could be seen as reflecting the assumed fragile bodily health of a middle- and upper-class woman yet Mrs Carson is a former “factory girl” (MB 160) who has risen to the ranks of the new middle class with her husband, also a former factory worker. The fact that she still feels, after over twenty years, slightly uncomfortable in her role as a middle-class lady is manifest in the fact that she prefers to spend time with her maid who is “much more a companion to her than her highly-educated daughters” (MB 246). She also seems to experience hunger and have a hearty appetite even when having a headache; despite or perhaps because of it, she orders a breakfast with specific instructions: “Missis will have her breakfast up-stairs, cook, and the cold partridge as was left yesterday, and put plenty of cream in her coffee, and she thinks there’s a roll left, and she would like it well buttered” (MB 76). It can be argued that Mrs Carson’s headaches are part of the construction of the character of a middle-class lady: not having the privileged education her daughters have, for example, she is using her body, in this case headaches, to express her middle-class status. Heller and Moran argue that in nineteenth-century culture, a woman with an appetite was often marked “lower class”[207] and not only Mary’s but also Mrs Carson’s obvious appetite for food is a sign of their working-class status, despite Mrs Carson’s elevated social position.

The presence and the prominence of John Barton’s hunger is a narrative tool: it not only epitomises the deprivation caused by the economic depression and *laissez-faire* politics but it also advances the plot towards the pivotal point of the narrative: the murder of Harry Carson which shifts the focus from social and economic concerns to

[207] Heller and Moran, 23.

those of Victorian melodrama and romance.[208] Strictly speaking, it is not hunger per se that makes John Barton kill the young man but the opium he begins to use as food substitute; it gradually replaces food in his diet and as the narrator points out, his "diseased thoughts" have "morbid power [that] might be ascribed to the use of opium" (MB 198). The melodrama and the suspense concerning the death of Harry Carson and his suspected murderer Jem Wilson, who is Mary's childhood friend and suitor, not only turn the plot but also make hunger recede into the background; hunger becomes "nothing" (MB 270) compared to the drama of death and life played by the victim and the suspect who is facing a death sentence. The murder causes John Barton's hunger as a symbol of working-class plight to lose part of its potency; when expressing a kind of perverted nostalgic longing for "those days when hunger had been to her … something to be thought about, and mourned over" (MB 272), Mary Barton's thoughts seem to reflect the fact that the narrative itself becomes too occupied with action and legal concerns to think about, or mourn over the hunger of the characters.[209]

Although the narrative uses very graphic language when describing the living conditions of the poor to awaken the readers' sympathies it never describes the sensations of hunger in the characters. As Melissa Schaub notes, the narrative "erases the bodies of the workers who suffer, the reality of their anguish being expressed as discourse … rather than as somatic description."[210] The lack of descriptions of

[208] According to Raymond Williams the reason why "the flow of sympathy" evident at the novel's beginning stops is connected with the murder John Barton commits because it realises the actual "*fear of violence*" of the Victorian upper and middle classes who were afraid that the working-class suffering might lead to violence directed against them (Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, 89-90, iItalics original). Thus the sentimentalist discourse of the social problem novels such as *Mary Barton* fails to fulfil its purpose for as Williams points out, "[s]ympathy was transformed, not into action but into withdrawal" (109). Therefore the readers' sympathy is mixed and suffocated not just by the fear of social and economic decline but also by the fear of class confrontation and even a revolution. See also Sheila Smith's *The Other Nation: The Poor in English Novels of the 1840s and 1850s*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980).

[209] Mary Poovey argues that the shift in Mary's attitude to hunger illustrates the fact that "poverty as a source of meaningful distress" has given way to "emotional pain." She sees this as part of the narrative progress which gradually turns Mary into a character with implied genteel qualities (152).

[210] Schaub, 15.

embodied sensations, such as hunger, is a reminder of the difficulty of describing subjective physical states that one is not experiencing; it reflects the "loneliness of bodily experience"[211] as Maud Ellmann puts it. Discourse instead of physical description of sensations would thus be a framework the assumed middle-class readers could more easily comprehend and internalise. In the nineteenth century, the hunger of the poorest would have been visible because it could be encountered in public places; it would have entered at least the field of vision if not the field of consciousness of even those that ignored its existence. Although resorting to visual images of poverty and hunger instead of descriptions of physical sensations might expose the middle-class ignorance of the physical sensation of extreme hunger, shying away from too detailed descriptions of hunger could simply reflect a national trait, for in 1853 Edward John Tilt argued that "[t]he horror [i.e. fear] of dying from hunger is a peculiarity of the English character, pervading all ages, all classes, and all conditions of society."[212] Audrey Jaffe contends that "Victorian sympathy involves a spectator's (dread) fantasy of occupying another's social place"[213] and thus the representations of working-class hunger, poverty and distress would also represent a potential threat: the possible fall of fortunes of the industrial middle classes, many members of which, like Mr Carson in *Mary Barton*, were 'self-made men' who had risen to the ranks of the prosperous middle class from the relative poverty of the working classes.

In *Mary Barton* hunger is not only a physiological need but the hungry characters are also described as approaching a near animal state of existence. When John Barton is trying to find a way to procure food for his ill child he himself is

[211] Ellmann, 6.
[212] Edward John Tilt, *Elements of Health, and Principles of Female Hygiene* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1853) 307. He points out that this "horror" often leads into a situation where people eat too much, jeopardising perfect health (307)
[213] Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000) 8.

described as being hungry "almost to an animal pitch of ravenousness" (MB 25). Although the word 'almost' saves the character from being classified as not much better than an animal it does emphasise the connection between hunger and animality and the idea that extreme hunger brings out animal characteristics in a human being. Moreover, when connected with the starving working classes, hunger itself is described with an animal metaphor; it is described as "the gnawing wolf within" which the characters try to "deaden" (MB 64). While the word *gnawing* is often used to describe the feeling or even pangs of hunger in one's stomach, as in *gnawing hunger*, here hunger is a wolf that gnaws the body from inside and needs to be killed. It is as if hunger has become detached from the human body and is an animal that resides in it.

When John Barton grows more poor and miserable the progress is described in the growing degree of his animality. From the description of his hunger approaching "an animal pitch" (MB 25) he becomes a character with "hunger in his shrunk, fierce, animal look" (MB 132). Hunger shrinks his human body which will gradually waste away but it also makes him more and more like an angry and violent animal. One of the mill-owners comments on the behaviour of a mill-worker who has thrown vitriol on the legs of a knobstick[214] and then beaten him up by stating that "they're more like wild beasts than human beings" (MB 213). The undeniably cruel action seems irrational and brutish to most of the mill-owners who cannot see it as "the consequence of want and need" (MB 212) as the narrator explains. Although not questioning the animal-like behaviour of the workers the narrator nevertheless questions the mill-owner's right to condemn the worker's behaviour by interrupting the characters' direct speech with a comment placed in parentheses: "(Well, who might have made them different?)" (MB 213). The narrator is thus partly placing the responsibility for the workers' condition on

[214] A knobstick is a strikebreaker.

the mill-owners, arguing that they would have been able to prevent the workers from descending to the level of animals.[215]

When describing the plight of the working-class Davenports, the narrator explains how one descends to the dark cellar where "a family of human beings lived" (MB 66) as if feeling the need to underline the fact that despite the basically inhuman environment these characters reside in, they are, after all, human beings; the description also enforces the idea that hunger has a power to bring out the animal in humans. The father of the Davenport family is ill with "typhus fever" (MB 71); his body is a "worn skeleton" (MB 69) and when drinking the tea meant for his wife, he "snatched at it with animal instinct, with a selfishness he had never shown in health" (MB 69). The narrator's statement of the character's 'animal instincts' is mitigated by the assurance that his conduct, as is the near animal state of existence of the whole family, is exceptional and due to his illness. The state of the family's life is emphasised not only by the graphic descriptions of their wretched living conditions and the apparent near starvation of the family members but also by the allusions to the animal nature of the husband. The wife is described as sitting "on her husband's lair" (MB 67); the use of the word *lair*, a wild animal's den, to refer to the flat, and the animal greed the husband shows illustrate the effects of the burning down of a mill: instead of the unexpected luxurious leisure of the mill owners the workers are suffering from hunger and disease and dragged down to an inhuman way of life.

While straddling humanity and animality the characters begin to embody the Kristevan position of abject: the object of sympathy turns into abject, something the reader wants to turn away from, as if from anything which "does not respect borders,

[215] David Thiele sees the comment that the narrator makes in parentheses as criticism on the lack of education especially in arts and humanities with which the wealthy mill-owners should provide their employees (Thiele, 271).

positions, rules."[216] Thus the often quoted description of the Davenports' squalid cellar, which is dark and smells "fetid" and where "the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up" (MB 66-7) through the brick floor, for example, could work as a distancing effect not only because of the semi-animal nature of the characters but also because for the Victorian middle classes dirt was often equated with indecency. Natalka Freeland argues that in the minds of the Victorian readers of novels such as *Mary Barton* "the metonymic relation between poverty and dirt could be translated into a metaphoric association of poverty and vice."[217] The representations of poverty and dirt would constitute another potential threat: the filth of the poor, and thus the indecency, would invade the middle-class subjects. The filthy living conditions of the Davenports would not necessarily present them as victims of circumstances deserving sympathy but might instead enforce the readers' concept of the poor. If being poor and hungry was seen as a moral failure, so was being poor and dirty as well; Freeland notes that "many Victorians considered the omnipresent coincidence of filth and poverty evidence that the poor chose to be dirty."[218] 'Cleanliness is next to godliness,' a saying the Victorian middle class obviously valued highly, is in the novel demonstrated by Alice Wilson who not only manages to keep her cellar flat scrupulously clean but who is also "pure and good, so true, although so humble a Christian" (MB 320).

[216] Kristeva, 4.
[217] Natalka Freeland, "The Politics of Dirt in *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*," *Studies in English Literature , 1500-1900*, 42:4 (2002) 804.
[218] Freeland, 802. Interestingly, as much as dirt was a problematic issue to the Victorians there were also schemes of collecting and making use of human excrement as fertiliser. See Freeland or Tom Crook, "Putting Matter in Its Right Place: Dirt, Time, and Regeneration in Mid-Victorian Britain," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 13.2 (2008). Crook, for example, notes that "[b]etween the 1840s and 1870s, the question of how to put human excrement in the right place elicited a mass of pamphlets and articles; engaged two parliamentary select committees and one Royal Commission; and was a consistent item on the agenda of the NAPSS [National Association for the Promotion of Social Science]" (Crook, 206).

Meat and Tea: Emblems of Englishness?

While John Barton and his fellow trade unionists are willing to "kill for bread", as Carol Lansbury puts its,[219] it can be argued that John Barton's daughter Mary is contemplating 'selling' herself for meat. Courted by the middle-class Harry Carson and flattered by his attentions, Mary immerses herself in social fantasy of how she would "ride from church in her carriage, with wedding bells ringing, and take up her astonished father, and drive away from the old dim work-a-day court for ever, to live in a grand house, where her father should have … meat dinners, every day,—and all day long if he liked" (MB 91). As Thomas P. Fair points out, from Mary's point of view her relationship with Harry Carson is "neither sexual nor romantic but defined by the economic advantages associated with such a relationship."[220] A marriage with the wealthy mill owner's son would give Mary more social and economic power represented not only by improvement in housing but also in diet, and her daydreams of meat dinners for her father as often as he would want show the symbolic value of meat as an indicator of economic and social power. Yet her dealings with Harry Carson also imply her 'meatiness', that is, her status as an object to be consumed in the sexual sense, especially since the only thing she has to offer in exchange for the social and economic advantages she dreams of is herself. Nick Fiddes points out that "edibility" vocabulary frequently "relate[s] women to meat in particular"[221] and 'meat' as a word in colloquial English was and is used to refer to specifically the female body "as an instrument of

[219] Coral Lansbury, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Novel of Social Crisis* (London: Paul Elek, 1975) 24.
[220] Thomas P. Fair, "Elizabeth Gaskell: A Well-Tempered Madness," *Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic After Thirty Years*, ed. Annette R. Federico (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009) 221. Kamilla Elliott also notes that Mary's relationship with Harry Carson is more about "rational, material, strategic, social, [and] pragmatic" issues than about romantic love (Kamilla Elliott, "The Romance of Politics and the Politics of Romance in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 21 (2007), 28).
[221] Nick Fiddes, *Meat: A Natural Symbol* (London: Routledge, 1991) 150. Eira Patnaik argues that women have been associated with "edible commodities" throughout history (Eira Patnaik, "The Succulent Gender: Eat Her Softly," *Literary Gastronomy*, ed. David Bevan, Amsterdam: Rodopi , 1988, 59).

sexual pleasure".[222] That for Harry Carson it is specifically Mary's body that is on the market is clear from the fact that he only suggests marrying her after she tells him that "I cannot love you. I have tried, and I really cannot" (MB 159) and that she does not want to meet him anymore: "I thought we could be happy enough without marriage" (MB 159). Luce Irigaray argues that a woman in a patriarchal society can be seen as a commodity, the exchange of which between men forms the basis of that society. As a commodity, a woman would inhabit two bodies: "her 'natural' body and her socially valued, exchangeable body"; her status as a commodity would be manifest in her physical body and her abstract market value.[223] For the middle-class Harry Carson, Mary as a commodity does not have social "exchange value"[224] a fact which is manifest in his plans not to marry her but only exploit her sexually. His marriage to a working-class girl would not be socially or economically acceptable; it would make his parents "angry" and would expose him to "so much ridicule" (MB 159); for him, Mary only has value as a "matter-body".[225] If consenting to be sexually exploited, Mary would become a 'piece of meat' appropriated for appeasing sexual hunger. What happens to a working-class woman whose value as a commodity is only 'natural' is manifest by Mary's aunt Esther who enters a sexual relationship without being married and loses her social exchange value with the loss of her virginity and consequently becomes a prostitute whose value as a commodity depends solely on her physical body.

Foods tend to be categorised according to their connotations and meat, especially red meat, connotes both class and gender; in addition to social and economic

[222] "meat." Eric Partridge, *The Routledge Dictionary of Historical Slang*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973.
[223]Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, transl. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 178-180. Irigaray is here applying Marx's *Capital* to her interpretation of the position of women in a "patriarchal society" (184). She maintains that their status of an exchange commodity is one of the primary reasons for the subjugation of women within social and cultural systems (173).
[224] Irigaray, 176.
[225] Irigaray, 176.

power it also connotes "strength and masculinity."[226] Gendering foods does not only reflect assumptions about biological properties and needs, such as the idea that male bodies would need more red meat than female ones, but constructed social and cultural ones as well: eating meat connotes maleness; meat, "strong and strong making, giving vigour, blood, and health, is the dish for the men".[227] The notion that "[m]eat is the food of those who control the natural environment"[228] is often used to explain the idea that meat is specifically a masculine food. Controlling resources has been considered a masculine prerogative and consuming red meat, especially considering its high social and economic status, would reflect that prerogative. In *Mary Barton* the elder and the younger Mr Carson consume grilled steaks for their breakfast, whereas Mrs Carson consumes cold partridge. Annette Cozzi notes that this seems to reflect the gendered division of meat consumption: men consume red meat and women white meat.[229] Nevertheless, partridge also has economic connotations for game and poultry were "acknowledged luxuries"[230] in the nineteenth century and were served cold as part of a well stocked breakfast table.

The lack of meat in the diet of the working-class John Barton indicates not only his exclusion from economic and social power but also from the masculine culture of eating meat. It can be argued that the working class male characters in the novel are emasculated by the economic plight for it deprives them of their role as the family

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[226] Lupton, 28.
[227] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 192. For more on gendered connotations of meat, see for example Julia Twigg, "Vegetarianism and the Meanings of Meat," *The Sociology of Food and Eating: Essays on the Social Significance of Food*, ed. Anne Murcott, Aldershot: Gower, 1984, 18-31. Carol J.Adams discusses the gender connotations of meat as well as the meanings of meat in general in *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2000).
[228] Fiddes, 159.
[229] Cozzi, 90. Cozzi contends that the role of food in defining national identity in literature is sadly neglected and that "[m]ost analyses usually discuss food in the novel in terms of gender" (163-4). Therefore it is interesting that her analysis on *Mary Barton* discusses national identity rather fleetingly and concentrates instead on gender.
[230] Sarah Freeman, *Mutton and Oysters: The Victorians and Their Food* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1989) 47.

breadwinners; George Wilson is deploring the fact that he has to live on his son, "taking a' his flesh-meat money to buy bread for me and them as I ought to be keeping" (MB 73) because he himself is unemployed, and John Barton ends up being supported by his daughter whose earnings pay for their rent and who takes extra sewing to secure "one good meal for her father on the next day" (MB 164). Nevertheless, the money that she gives to "her father's eager clutch" (MB 164) is more often used to buy opium than food. Mary's plans to provide meat for her father once she has married her wealthy middle-class suitor would guarantee him an adequate diet which would also be an opportunity for him to enter the masculine meat-eating sphere. Yet consuming meat provided by the middle-class Carsons would be a form of charity from the point of view of a character who shuns all financial aid from the authorities and union alike: "D—n their charity and their money! I want work and it is my right. I want work" (MB 133).

Whether any given person, or in this case a character, has access to meat is also a class issue and therefore meat connotes not only gender but also class. Whether a nineteenth-century working-class family could afford meat would have depended on their income and on how much money they had to spend on food in general at any given time. E. P. Thompson notes that meat consumption denoted "material standards," that is, a rise in income would have also meant a rise in meat consumption.[231] In *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* Engels notes that the more prosperous working-class families could consume meat daily whereas in families on lower income levels, "the proportion of bread and potatoes increases." The lowest income group, according to Engels the Irish, could not afford even bread but would have existed solely on potatoes.[232] In *Mary Barton*, apart from the opening chapters' extravagance of ham,

[231] Thompson, 349.
[232] Engels, 140. Even if a working-class family could purchase meat the quality of the meat they could afford was often more than questionable. The quality of food in general varied in Victorian England and food adulteration was an everyday reality.

and the more working-class bacon, meat belongs to the tables of the middle-class mill-owners. When demanding work and reasonable pay for it, the mill-workers state that they "want it for daily bread, for life itself" (MB 221) thus implying the generic meaning of bread as food; a meaning which according to *Oxford English Dictionary* most likely derives from the Lord's Prayer.[233] For the mill-workers, bread means food and when John Barton sinks deeper into poverty, it is not accompanied with "boiled bacon" (MB 65) anymore but forms the whole meal (MB 132).

The small amount of meat in the diet of John Barton indicates his powerlessness and lack of control over both natural and economic resources. Meat, and specifically beef or large joints of meat, were socially marked foods, and the narrator's slightly disapproving view on the uselessness of certain pieces of tableware in the Bartons' household at the beginning of the novel implies both criticism and judgement of the level of consumption of the family: their possessions include "articles, for which one would have fancied their possessors could find no use—such as triangular pieces of glass to save carving knives and forks from dirtying table-cloths" (MB 13). Implicit in the narrator's comment is a view that the ownership of a carving knife and fork rests exceeds the accepted level of consumption of a Mancunian working-class family. Not only are the unexpected items of tableware signs of conspicuous consumption but they also imply that the household would have the means to purchase and consume large joints of meat that require carving utensils. The need to point out the futile existence of a carving set in a working-class home reflects the social expectations concerning food consumption; the family cannot and should not afford to buy and prepare large joints of roasting meat.

[233] "bread, n."

In nineteenth-century vegetarian discourse, the cost of meat was used as a reason to adopt a vegetarian diet, in addition to arguing that human beings are not naturally carnivores and therefore can easily survive without meat. Anna Kingsford, a nineteenth-century animal rights activist and a champion of vegetarianism, for example, points out that a vegetarian diet would be more economical: "it is cheaper to buy beans and meal than to buy pork and suet."[234] That meat would be a superfluous commodity in the human diet was stressed also in *The Wealth of Nations* where Adam Smith argues that human beings can well live without eating meat.[235] He points out that meat does not form an important part of a working-class diet partly because a diet consisting of vegetable food was less expensive.[236] The most optimistic advocates of vegetarian diets considered vegetarianism a way to combat the poverty and the hunger of the lower classes and despite the fact that in *Mary Barton*, for example, the organisers of charity meals for the starving working classes feed them with meat-based soup ("Mrs Aldred makes two cows' heads into soup every week, and people come many miles to fetch it", MB 213), certain charitable organisations in nineteenth-century Britain offered the working-class poor vegetable soup and wholemeal bread in their soup kitchens, and food reformers tried to persuade the poor to adopt vegetarian cooking at home as well. James Gregory notes that the encouragemenet given to the poor by the predominantly middle-class vegetarian reformers to adopt a vegetarian diet was one example of the

[234]Anna Kingsford, "The Essence of True Justice," (1912) rpt. in *Ethical Vegetarianism: From Pythagoras to Peter Singer*, eds. Kerry S. Walters and Lisa Portmess (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 110. Interestingly, the first vegetarian association was established in Manchester where in 1809 "a vegetarian coalition" was formed by members of the Swedenborgian Bible Christian Church. The trigger for renouncing meat among the congregation was the belief that meat-eating symbolised the Fall and was thus "the source of all evil." In 1847, the prominently working-class Bible Christians took part in the formation of the British Vegetarian Society (Colin Spencer, *The Heretic's Feast: A History of Vegetarianism*, Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995, 251-3). Nineteenth-century vegetarian rhetoric was often sentimental and nostalgic; vegetarian food was connected with ideas of an Arcadian past when humans cultivated the ground and ate bread, "an innocent type of all human food" instead of living in towns with "blood-smeared butchers' stalls" (Kingsford, 109). Nineteenth-century vegetarianism can thus be seen partly as a sentimental reaction to the industrialism and the urbanisation of certain parts of England such as the Manchester area.

[235] Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1176.

[236] Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 262.

more general "interference by the middle classes with the diet of the 'poorer classes'" whose cooking was considered "inadequate".[237] The working classes were nevertheless often unimpressed by the efforts; Gregory, for example, points out that the 'poorer classes' were largely rather reluctant to switch their food preferences, partly because meat consumption was linked with economic prosperity and partly because they believed that meat would keep up the bodily strength required by physical labour.[238] Moreover, as Ben Rogers points out, Victorians were not only fairly suspicious of vegetables, which they considered difficult to digest, but they associated "pulses with animals, [and] grains with the poor"[239] and vegetarian food would embody those qualities as well. Despite the middle-class nature of the nineteenth-century vegetarian movement, meat eating was also something that united the classes for in the opinion of the major part of the population, meat was a necessary component of every day diet partly because "a mixed diet was best-suited to the climate".[240]

The apex of the Barton family's meat consumption is presented when the Bartons give a tea-party to their friends the Wilsons at the beginning of the novel and the tea-table highlights the prominent place of meat, and also its origins, on the menu. The meat that the working class consumed in the nineteenth-century was mostly pork and bacon,[241] and in *Mary Barton* it is "frizzling ham" (MB 17) that releases appetising odours in the working-class Bartons' home whereas the smell of "broiled steaks" (MB

[237] James Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians: The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth-century Britain*, London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007, 155-6. Gregory points out that contrary to the vegetarian advocates' claims that a vegetarian diet would be cheaper, it was in fact often more expensive for "[l]ow demand for vegetarian specialities meant high prices or lack of supply" (156).
[238] Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians*, 155.
[239] Ben Rogers, 171-2.
[240] Gregory, 155. In *Economy of the Labouring Classes* (1857), William L. Sargant argues that even if a vegetarian diet might be beneficial to some people in certain circumstances, others need meat in their diet: "if a man has to task his bodily powers to the utmost, he must take his food in the concentrated form of flesh, qualifying it of course with a mixture of vegetables" (164-5). For a discussion on vegetarians and vegetarianism in Victorian fiction see James Gregory "Vegetable Fictions in the 'Kingdom of Roast Beef': Representing the Vegetarian in Victorian Literature," *Consuming Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century: Narratives of Consumption, 1700-1900*, eds. Tamara S. Wagner and Narin Hassan (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010) 17-34.
[241] Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 28.

75) in the middle-class Carsons' kitchen makes the hungry George Wilson even hungrier. The depicted working-class tea, the main meal of the day, in which the main protein is ham, recreates and enforces the social division in meat consumption. However, even if ham might be more humble meat than beef yet according to Laura Mason it had social connotations especially for the less privileged part of the population for whom ham "represented the height of bourgeois gentility".[242] The presence of ham on the menu marks the party as a special occasion, but as important as the ham as festive food is its origins. The order to buy "red-and-white, smoke-flavoured, Cumberland ham" (MB 16) to please George Wilson, who is from Cumberland and for whom the ham "will have a sort of relish of home with it" (MB 14), implies the importance of the provenance of food. Like "the oat bread of the north, the clap-bread of Cumberland and Westmoreland, … the bread of her childhood" (MB 31) that George Wilson's sister Alice treasures as a delicacy, the Cumberland ham is a link to the past and to home. Alice tells how her mother used to send her the bread for "she knew how good such things taste when far away from home" (MB 32-3). The food consumed as a child places the consumer in a certain social group; food is connected to the feelings of home and kinship and constructs and defines both social and personal identity.[243] Alice connects the bread to her childhood memories in the rural north of England, memories that are sentimentalised by geographical and temporal distance and which present the past almost as a pastoral idyll although it appears to have been poor and filled with hardships.

The gradual lessening of the economic power of the working-class Barton family is symbolised by their diet and meat's role in it. The comfortable meal and the "frizzling" ham, the peak of the family's economic power, and gentility, when it comes

[242] Laura Mason, "Everything Stops for Tea," *Eating with the Victorians*, ed. C. Anne Wilson, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004, 77.
[243] Lupton, 25.

to food consumption, give way to "cold fat boiled bacon" (MB 65), bacon being, according to Nick Fiddes, "subsidiary meat" and thus never in the main role on the menu,[244] and later to mere "bread and cheese" (MB 132), and finally to "crust-of-bread breakfast" (MB 252) as the process of the family's impoverishment proceeds. Even bread and cheese are "an unusual meal" (MB 132) and only possible after a visit to a pawn shop and by this time the household is more or less emptied of "superfluities" (MB 132), including the carving set rests. If lack of meat in their diet somehow emasculates the working-class men because excluding them from the masculine meat-eating culture then even more significantly it excludes them from the national culture symbolised by meat eating.

Meat might have been a contested commodity in the nineteenth century and its consumption open to ideological interpretations; it was socially marked but also reflected the national ideal. Tea, on the other hand, was a commodity that transmuted from a luxury for the few and thus socially marked, to the drink of all, gradually acquiring the status of a national emblem; in fact, Julie E. Fromer argues that during the nineteenth century it actually replaced beef as an emblem of Englishness.[245] From an ideological point of view, tea drinking united the nation and it is on this fact that the description of the tea-party at the beginning of the novel relies; the scene presents an experience the readers could identify with, regardless of class. Fromer maintains that the tea-party becomes "a symbol of universally shared Englishness… eliciting readers' sympathy by emphasizing connections between individuals and between classes".[246] The shared experience is further emphasised by the way the working-class Mrs Barton is described as embracing the proper tea-table rituals in mimicry of a middle-class lady

[244] Fiddes, 88.
[245] Julie E. Fromer, "'Deeply Indebted to the Tea-Plant': Representations of English National Identity in Victorian Histories of Tea," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36.2 (2008) 533.
[246] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 120.

by leaving the actual preparation of food to her daughter Mary, who thus stands in for a servant, and just presiding over the tea-table: "Mrs Barton knew manners too well to do anything but sit at the tea-table and make tea" (MB 17). Tea was drunk across social classes but as Fromer notes, tea-time rituals had connotations of specifically middle-class domesticity.[247] Mrs Barton's familiarity with the conventions of the tea-table emphasises the idea of a shared experience; she performs according to accepted rules, taking on a role that the middle-class readers, for example, could understand and identify with. In this sense the narrative blurs the divide between classes and class cultures, providing a framework for a common national identity.

Although Alice Wilson's cellar home is scrupulously clean it does not exude domestic comfort for she cannot afford to participate in the domesticated tea-drinking culture: for her tea remains a luxury bought and consumed only on special occasions. Alice Wilson substitutes tea with herbal tea brewed from the herbs she picks up unless "some thoughtful mistress made a present of tea-leaves from her more abundant house-hold" (MB 31). Even if her possessions include a tea-pot, tea is not a staple commodity, for when having visitors she has to make a purchase of it: "Half an ounce of tea and a quarter of a pound of butter went far to absorb her morning's wages" (MB 30-1). Nevertheless, Alices's nephew Will, whom Alice has brought up and who is now a sailor, remembers the herbal tea she used to prepare him after a day in the fields: "I've tasted tea in China since then, but it wasn't half so good as the herb tea she used to make for me o' Sunday nights" (MB 228). In Will's memory, Alice's herb tea, which is prepared using plants growing in an English soil, has connotations not only of his childhood which he remembers as "happy times" (MB 228) but also of home. To prefer

[247] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 13-14.

herb tea is to go back to the roots of real Englishness as opposed to the Englishness constructed through drinking tea, a basically foreign substance.

Drugs and Drink: Food Substitutes

In 1853, the English physician and physiologist William Benjamin Carpenter, when discussing physiological reasons for the feeling of hunger, argued that although hunger is a need of the whole bodily system, it is "*immediately* dependent upon some condition of Stomach" and can therefore be "temporarily alleviated, by introducing into the digestive cavity matter which is not alimentary".[248] In *Mary Barton*, hunger is a need that is alleviated with substances other than food and these substitutes contest food's primacy for the human body, becoming necessities. When John Barton and George Wilson visit the Davenports' cellar dwelling, Wilson sees the mother of the family breastfeeding one of the children: "the woman [was] suckling the child from her dry, withered breast" (MB 71). The words *dry* and *withered* indicate that the breast does not produce milk which the child could feed on. When George Wilson expresses his astonishment at the fact that the mother is nursing a child that should be weaned already she points out that "it keeps him quiet when I've nought else to gi' him, and he'll get a bit of sleep lying there if he's getten nought beside" (MB 71-2). The mother fails in her attempt to provide food for her children to the extent that even her attempt to offer herself as food fails: her body is unable to perform its function. The mother is thus feeding her child with sham food that will comfort but does not nourish him. Symbolically this is what the mill-owners are doing when before the meeting with the representatives of the workers some of them suggest that to keep the workers content

[248]William Benjamin Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology* (Philadelphia: Blanchard and Lea, 1853) 391, italics original. Another nineteenth-century physiologist argues similarly that "the sensations of hunger" can be momentarily allayed; there is "relief afforded [from hunger], though only temporarily, by the introduction of even non-alimentary substances into this organ" (William Senhouse Kirkes, *Manual of Physiology*, Philadelphia: Blanchard and Lea, 1859, 196).

and to end the strike "a slight concession" should be made, "just a sugar-plum to quieten the naughty child, a sacrifice to peace and quietness" (MB 212). Like the mother who is offering her dry breast to keep her hungry child quiet, the mill-owners are offering the hungry workers a metaphorical sweet that would keep them quiet but would not alleviate their hunger. Metaphorically speaking, the starving shrunken bodies of the working-class and the dry withered breast stand for bodies consumed by the middle-class mill-owners. In *Capital* (1867) Karl Marx famously argues that "[c]apital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks."[249] In *Mary Barton*, John Barton questions the fact that when he is out of work he starves but the mill-owners do not because they have capital: "You'll say…they'n getten capital an' we'n getten none. I say, our labour's our capital, and we ought to draw interest on that. They get interest on their capital somehow a' this time' while ourn is lying idle, else how could they all live as they do?" (MB 73). Although the factory in which Barton has worked is lying idle as is his 'capital' the capital of the mill-owners stays active. Even when Barton and his peers, the living capital in the Marxist sense, are struggling to keep alive, the 'dead labour' prospers. It keeps sucking the blood of the workers and metaphorically consumes them while they are, as Christopher Lindner puts it, "waiting for an infusion of capital to re-animate" them.[250]

In the novel, working-class hunger is connected with opium which is used as a substitute for food and to metaphorically fill an empty stomach. The profuse use of opium is disconcerting for the modern readers for opium is classified as an addictive drug in the twenty-first century. The Victorians' relationship with opium was a more complicated one because of no clear distinction between its medical and non-medical

[249] Karl Marx. *Capital, Volume I.*London: ElecBook, 2001, 335.
[250] Christopher Lindner, "Outside Looking In: Material Culture in Gaskell's Industrial Novels," *Orbis Litterarum* 55 (2000): 390.

use. Especially in the early decades of the nineteenth century opium was used as a medicine to treat a wide variety of symptoms and could be freely possessed; it was "the only effective analgesic available" and was easily available without the need to consult a doctor.[251] Virginia Berridge points out that although opium-based products were easily accessible, there was a growing concern about the status and the effects of opium eating which culminated in the 1868 Pharmacy Act which decreed that opium could only be sold by professional pharmacists.[252] The medical use of opium often turned into an addiction as happened to Thomas De Quincey whose autobiographical *Confessions of an Opium-Eater* (1822) records his opium dreams as well as his poverty-stricken life in London. The rather neutral reaction to opium use in the nineteenth century is reflected in the reception of De Quincey's book which according to Berridge was "less concerned or anxious" than what could be expected.[253]

The economic is mixed with social and cultural in the descriptions of opium use in *Mary Barton*. The narrative refers to the three "terrible years 1839, 1840, and 1841" (MB 96) of misery when "trade had been getting worse and worse" and many working-class families, who had not enough money to pay for food, "went through a gradual starvation" (MB 96). In the novel the year 1839 is the year when a delegation of working men submit a petition to Parliament intended to make them "hear witnesses who could testify to the unparalleled destitution of the manufacturing disticts" (MB 97-8). The year 1839 is also the year when the First OpiumWar (1839-1842) between Britain and China began, a fact that Liam Corley sees as being significant. He argues

[251] Louise Foxcroft, *The Making of Addiction: The 'Use and Abuse' of Opium in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 11.
[252] Virginia Berridge, "Victorian Opium Eating: Responses to Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England," *Victorian Studies* 21.4 (Summer 1978) 442. See also Foxcroft, 11-12. The change from medical to non-medical connotations of opium is represented in the literature of the latter half of the nineteenth century, most famously in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891) and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes narratives.
[253] Berridge, "Victorian Opium Eating: Responses to Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England," 442. Louise Foxcroft notes that the book was both praised and criticised (19, 23).

that *Mary Barton* should not be considered just a "description of a local problem" but of a more global one for he sees the narrative representing the working class as "enmeshed in the construction of Britain's overseas hegemony".[254] He explains that the hardship the working class faced in industrial Manchester was partly due to the Opium War because it meant the cessation of export of cotton, and opium, to China and consequently more competition for other orders.[255] While there certainly is a link "between working class hunger, opium addiction, and the industrialists' desire for expanding markets" in the novel, as Corley states, I would not go as far as claim that it was Gaskell's "choice to set *Mary Barton* during the Opium War".[256] The novel never mentions the Opium War, as Corley also admits,[257] neither does it discuss the origins of the opium used by the characters. Moreover, although there is no clear indication of dates in the novel, apart from the three years mentioned by the narrator, it is more plausible to think that Gaskell chose to set the narrative at the end of the 1830s and the beginning of 1840s simply because of the mass starvation that the working class faced in those years. In a narrative which is more or less a homily on how to build bridges of understanding on an individual level the emphasis remains more on the personal than on the global politics. Moreover, the first Chartist petition was actually presented to and rejected by Parliament in July 1839, a fact which perhaps provides a more accurate historical point of reference if one wishes to consider the motivation for the timeline of the novel.

Although China was often considered as the source of opium in Victorian Britain, and despite the fact that opium was grown in British India, the major part of the

[254] Liam Corley, "The Imperial Addiction of *Mary Barton*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 17 (2003), 1-2.
[255] Corley, 4-5.
[256] Corley, 5-6.
[257] Corley, 7.

opium sold in nineteenth-century Britain was actually imported from Turkey.[258] China was the origins of most of the tea drunk in Britain in the nineteenth century but Britain actually exported opium to China from India. Marty Roth points out that opium and tea were connected not only by their imperial provenance but also by the fact that they can both be seen as addictive drugs. What made the difference was the fact that whereas tea was considered " 'civilized' and 'mild' " opium was "barbaric and strong." He further points out how both became "identified with their consumers rather than producers, so that opium that was British-produced and illicitly sold to China soon became the demonic Chinese product par excellence, and tea, which was Chinese and sold to the English, very soon came to constitute Britishness itself."[259] While tea became the national beverage, opium, considering its wide use in various forms, can be seen as the national drug. Nevertheless, as Cannon Schmitt points out, **"**drinking tea has been naturalized (or Anglicized) in a way that eating opium has not".[260]

The acceptance of, or rather the unconcern about the use of opium partly explains the several mentions of opium use in *Mary Barton*. It was a generally accepted notion that especially working-class people used opium as a stimulant[261] but it was

[258] Foxcroft, 12. Victoria Berridge notes that there were experiments made to cultivate opium in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but "British opium… never became large-scale commercial propositions to rival the pre-eminence of the imported drug" (Virginia Berridge, *Opium and the People: Opiate Use and Drug Control Policy in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century England*, London: Free Association Books, 1999, 16).

[259] Marty Roth, "Victorian Highs: Detection, Drugs, and Empire," *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction*, eds. Janet Farrel Brodie and Marc Redfield (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 92.

[260] Cannon Schmitt, "Narrating National Addictions: De Quincey, Opium, and Tea," *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction*, eds. Janet Farrel Brodie and Marc Redfield (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 83-4. In 1839, William A. Alcott compared the effects of tea to those of opium, arguing that tea and opium are similar "in nature and properties", a fact which "shows its unfitness for use as a common beverage" (Alcott, *Tea and Coffee*, 27). He further argues that in addition to having similar medicinal qualities to those of opium, "tea is poisonous", especially as an extract, an argument he supports with examples of tests made on animals (52-5). On the other hand, he does not value coffee much higher as a beverage but contends that its place is not "among the articles of food and drink furnished for our tables" but more in the medicine cabinet (133).

[261] Berridge, "Victorian Opium Eating: Responses to Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England," 447. Wolfgang Schivelbusch argues that there seems to have been a difference in the way opium was seen by the different classes. Middle classes used it mostly as an analgesic as well as general medication for

nevertheless used as a sedative as well. In *Mary Barton* the narrator states how when the unemployed working-class characters have no food and hardly any money to buy it they use the money for buying opium instead of food: "Many a penny that would have gone little way enough in oatmeal or potatoes, bought opium to still the hungry little ones, and make them forget their uneasiness in heavy troubled sleep. It was mother's mercy" (MB 64). As is evident, opium is here used as a cheaper substitute for food that temporarily satisfies the needs of starving children by making them forget their hunger for a while. It is used as a sham food: it is consumed as food and meant to alleviate hunger like food does but it lacks the nourishing quality of food.[262] The idea of opium as stimulant is challenged here by showing that it is used as a sedative due to the circumstances but the narrator nevertheless takes a risk in the social realism when introducing the idea of giving opium to children, for the notion was that opium was often used by the working classes to keep children still especially by mothers who worked in the factories and who were obliged to take their children with them to work or by the nurses with whom some mothers left their children for the day. In contemporary (middle-class) discussion on opium this kind of practice was seen as going against the idea of the importance of maternal duties and indicating the harmful effect of women's factory work.[263] By presenting a working-class mother who gives her children opium the narrative is inviting an unsympathetic reaction from the readers.

Opium-eating is used to illustrate John Barton's gradual decline from a poor but respectable working-class character to a murderer. His growing use of opium after the trip to London and the failure of the petition is engendered by hopelessness and hunger;

"hysterical and nervous conditions, motion sickness, migraines, etc." whereas for the working classes it was also a recreational drug for it was cheaper than alcohol (206-7).

[262] A Dr Park from London discusses hunger in *The Analectic Magazine* in 1819, and notes that "[o]pium possesses the power of assuaging hunger" partly because it slows down the bowel movement (Dr Park, "Phenomena of Hunger," *The Analectic Magazine*, vol. 13, 1819, 86).

[263] Berridge, "Victorian Opium Eating: Responses to Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England," 449.

opium becomes a necessity, taking the place of food: "He had hesitated between the purchase of meal or opium, and had chosen the latter, for its use had become a necessity with him. He wanted it to relieve him from the terrible depression its absence occasioned. A large lump seemed only to bring him into a natural state, or what had been his natural state formerly" (MB 142-3). Again, opium is chosen over food but this time the explanation is less sentimental. When a mother is presented as being forced to feed her children with opium because the same amount of money that she uses for it could not buy a sufficient amount of food the narrative utilises the stock ingredient of humanitarian narrative and of Victorian sentimentalism: the suffering of innocent children. When John Barton chooses to consume opium instead of food, seizing his daughter's earning with eagerness "sometimes prompted by a savage hunger it is true, but more frequently by a craving for opium" (MB 164) he is presented as making a conscious choice between satisfying hunger for food or satisfying hunger for a substance that affects his mental state. While pointing out how the origins of the "diseased thoughts" (MB 198) that plague John Barton's mind, and thus foreshadowing the murder he will later commit, can be partly traced to the use of opium, the narrator nevertheless attempts to give an explanation to his addiction which would make it appear less a vice and more the consequence of adverse circumstances: "But before you blame too harshly this use, or rather abuse, try a hopeless life, with daily cravings of the body for food. …Would you not be glad to forget life, and its burdens? And opium gives forgetfulness for a time" (MB 198). Virginia Berridge points out that there was a general notion "in official, public health, and 'respectable' circles" that the working classes used opium as a cheaper substitute for alcohol.[264] Nevertheless, in *Mary Barton*

[264] Berridge, "Victorian Opium Eating: Responses to Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England," 446.

it is used as a cheaper substitute for food; it is a means to escape from the grim reality but also as a means to feed one's starving body.[265]

When showing opium eating as one of the consequences of the economic and political climate and even of the lack of communication between the classes, the narrative is trying to make away with the general myth of how and why the working classes used opium. Nevertheless, in its attempt at social realism it also manages to enforce the idea that the working classes abuse opium and thus enforce class prejudices. Although the use of opium was not wholly condemnable in Victorian England especially in its various medical uses, and although middle classes, too, used opium, the working-class use of it had connotations of a vice comparable to that of the use of alcohol. Narrating representations of opium use was hazardous also because working-class opium use was seen as a threat to the middle classes. According to Berridge, "[t]here existed an explicit fear of 'contamination' by working-class opium eating and a belief that it could have a disruptive impact on middle-class society."[266] It was feared that the use of opium among the working classes would spread to the middle classes and bring disorder and even chaos. There was nevertheless a fear of the opium's contaminating effects on a larger national scale. Despite the fact that opium and its use were not something specifically Chinese, the image of the opium use and the user was nevertheless heavily infused by the idea of the oriental other. Cannon Schmitt points out that although opium was widely available in Britain its use as drug could be seen as a

[265] John Barton's use of opium is interestingly tied with his activity in the trade union for his daughter is described as dreading the night time when her father is sitting silently by the fireplace eating opium and "[s]trange faces of pale men, with dark glaring eyes, peered into the inner darkness, and seemed desirous to ascertain if her father was at home. Or a hand and arm (the body hidden) was put within the door, and beckoned him away. … They were all desperate members of trades' unions, ready for any thing" (MB 136). For a modern reader the appearances and behaviour of the mysterious characters and the secretive air of the procedure resemble more drug trade than union activity.

[266] Berridge, "Victorian Opium Eating: Responses to Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England," 448.

threat to one's "national and racial identity".[267] If assimilating food means assimilating its symbolic qualities in addition to its nutritional ones then incorporating opium would mean incorporating both its narcotic and symbolic properties. If opium symbolises "foreigness and … repugnant degradation"[268] and if one is what one consumes then by consuming opium one potentially becomes foreign and repugnant. In a culture where the working class is considered by default the cultural and even the national other, the abuse of opium by a member of the working class would render him or her even more foreign. Whereas tea, the consumption of which is described at the beginning in the working-class home of the Bartons, creates a feeling of common culture and one nation, John Barton's use of opium serves as a cultural divider.

As a counterpart to the 'oriental' remedy for the ills of a working-class life as well as the use of opium based products for medical purposes, the narrative also presents remedies that are fundamentally very English, such as the "meadow-sweet … tea" (MB 142) Alice Wilson plans to prepare for her sister-in-law's cough. When the reader first meets the working-class Alice, she has just come home after spending the whole Sunday "in the fields, gathering wild herbs for drinks and medicine, for in addition to her invaluable qualities as a sick nurse and her worldly occupations as a washerwoman, she added a considerable knowledge of hedge and field simples" (MB 15). Unlike opium, tainted by its associations with the oriental other and intertwined with the expansionist politics, the simples Alice prepares are rooted in the English nature and the English culture. As Amy Mae King notes, Alice Wilson is a representative of the "fading vernacular medical tradition," based on oral folk tradition

[267] Schmitt, 70. Interestingly, the hot spot of especially opium smoking in London was situated geographically in the east. The majority of the opium dens were to be found in East End. Alan Bewell claims that in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, De Quincey expresses the fear that opium consumption could affect one's cultural identity and that by consuming opium, the product of the Empire, the "English are being consumed by it [the Empire]". He further notes how the title of the book presents "a dietary hybrid, an orientalized Englishman" (Alan Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999, 154).
[268] Foxcroft, 75.

rather than medical science.[269] King sees the presence of amateur natural history in *Mary Barton*, in the form of Alice Wilson's skills as a herbalist and the working-class Job Legh's interest in the natural world and Linnean taxonomy, for example, as expressing Gaskell's remedy for the social ills: the aim is "for the two classes to *see* each other and classify themselves as like species."[270] King's suggestion seems to repeat in terms of natural history the solution that the narrator expresses in religious terminology: the classes should learn to consider each other as "fellow-creatures" (MB xxxv) and brothers between whom "a perfect understanding and complete confidence and love" (MB 457) would reign. King argues that according to Gaskell's biography she seems to have been "conversant with natural history topics and the emergent scientific questions of the early Victorian era."[271] While this is a plausible argument, Gaskell was related to Charles Darwin and interested in his work, for example, I would hesitate to claim that the novel would suggest a solution based on natural history rather than on Gaskell's Unitarian world view, no matter how progressive that view might have been. Gaskell might have been "conversant" on natural history but the novel reveals a much deeper engagement with issues and phraseology based on religious beliefs.

Alice Wilson's engagement in herbal medicine suggests a working-class tradition obviously lost to the assumed middle-class readership, in which the narrator at least momentarily is included. The narrator points out how Alice's cellar room is filled with "all manner of hedge-row, ditch, and field plants, which we are accustomed to call valueless, but which have a powerful effect either for good or for evil, and are consequently much used among the poor" (MB 15). The pronoun 'we' and the word 'valueless' imply a shared culture from which 'the poor' are excluded; the narrator

[269] Amy Mae King, "Taxonomical Cures: The Politics of Natural History and Herbalist Medicine in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*," *Romantic Science: The Literary Forms of Natural History*, ed. Noah Heringman, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, 259.
[270] King, 258. Italics original.
[271] King, 256.

refers to a potentially curious lower-class tradition of finding alternative and economical solutions for bodily and mental ills. Virginia Berridge argues that one of the reasons why opium became so widely used among the working classes was the fact that "the rural remedies comprising herbs and plants which could be freely picked were no longer available when the country was several miles away."[272] In *Mary Barton*, the country seems to be accessible to working-class characters such as Alice yet her knowledge of plants and their possible uses as medicine is used to refer back to her childhood in the rural North of England rather than to the proximity of countryside of her present home. She is also a representative of the tradition of neighbourly help for in addition to her occupation as a sick nurse, she also feeds her sick neighbours, poor as she might be; she has a kettle not only for her own use but also "for cooking the delicate little messes of broth which Alice was sometimes able to manufacture for a sick neighbour" (MB 16).

Although the narrator points out that "[t]obacco and drink deaden the pangs of hunger, and make one forget the miserable home, the desolate future" (MB 218) the use and abuse of alcohol as a recourse do not feature prominently in the narrative perhaps due to the fact that opium is a cheaper substitute for alcohol, better afforded by the working-class poor, or to the still semi medical concept of opium.[273] The abuse of alcohol in *Mary Barton* is exemplified by one character: John Barton's sister-in-law Esther who runs off with a soldier and ends up selling her starving body in the streets. She becomes addicted to alcohol which is the only thing that makes her life bearable: "It's the only thing to keep… [me] from suicide" (MB 192). Robyn R. Warhol points out that Esther's motive for drinking "anticipates the psychoanalytic concept of 'self-medication'", that is, she drinks because she needs to "numb the pain" of all the bad

[272] Berridge, *Opium and the People*, 87.
[273] Louise Foxcroft notes that alcohol was often considered the more dangerous drug of the two, causing more violence and deaths (176).

experiences.[274] The character of Esther reflects the fact that her niece's social fantasy of becoming the wife of the middle-class Harry Carson would in all probability turn into sexual and social fall, making Mary an "outcast prostitute" (MB 185) and one of the "obscene things of night" (MB 275) similar to her aunt. Mary is nevertheless saved by her falling in love with the working-class Jem Wilson and the realisation of Harry Carson's less than honourable intentions. Coral Lansbury points out that Gaskell's treatment of the fallen woman was more compassionate than the treatment in Victorian England in general[275] and it is true that her treatment of Esther, for example, is understanding. Nevertheless, understanding and compassion do not mean acceptance and the sexual fall and prostitution has made Esther a sinner: "Hers is the leper-sin, and all stand aloof dreading to be counted unclean" (MB 185). Her sexual fall has offended the moral and social rules of the society and made her a social leper and consequently she dies in the end as if punished for her sin. She thus becomes one of those, in Robyn R. Warhol's words, "pathetic minor characters who drink themselves into oblivion or death". Warhol argues that often these kinds of characters are not given a "subjectivity" and are thus voiceless yet as she further points out there are exceptions such as Esther who are given the chance to tell their story from their own perspective.[276] She sees this as a narrative choice aimed at "a sympathetic readerly response"[277], a reading which would be in accordance with the general aim of the novel.

Even if Esther's sexual fall is seen as a sin in *Mary Barton*, her ending up as a prostitute and prostitution in general is more a social than a personal problem in the

[274] Robyn R. Warhol, "The Rhetoric of Addiction: From Victorian Novels to AA," *High Anxieties: Cultural Studies in Addiction*, eds. Janet Farrel Brodie and Marc Redfield (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 101.
[275] Lansbury, 31. Similarly, despite the sympathetic treatment, Ruth Hilton, the young seamstress seduced and abandoned by a wealthy young man in Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), also dies in the end. Mary Waters argues that in both *Mary Barton* and *Ruth* "Gaskell comments on the current condition of women" (Waters, 13).
[276] Warhol, 100-1.
[277] Warhol, 107.

novel. This is implied in Esther's account of how she finally ended up in the streets. Lured by her lover's promises to marry her she moves in with him and has a child but when his regiment is moved to Ireland she is left behind with her child. When the money that her lover leaves her is used and her means of respectable livelihood exhausted she has to come up with a way to support herself and her child: "it was winter, cold bleak winter; and my child was so ill, so ill, and I was starving. And I could not bear to see her suffer, and forgot how much better it would be for us to die together;—oh, her moans, her moans, which money could give the means of relieving! So I went out into the street one January night" (MB 189). Again, despite her morally condemnable position Esther is given the chance to narrate the story of her fall and consequently she is presented less an immoral temptress than a social victim who ends up in the streets because of starvation and because of trying to save her child's life. As a prostitute, Esther occupies not only a marginal but also an ambiguous position in society. Her sexual fall makes her abject for by disobeying the social and moral rules of female sexual conduct she has become "obscene" (MB 275) and similar to other socially marginalised bodies such as criminals her unruly body "disturbs the … order."[278] What makes her even more marginalised is the fact that she has become an alcoholic so that what money she has for consumption she uses for drink instead of food: "I must have drink. Such as live like me could not bear life, if they did not drink…. If I go without food, and without shelter, I must have my dram" (MB 192). Food, clothing, and shelter are among the things considered necessities for the well-being of an individual. Veblen points out that there are habits of consumption such as religious fasting or drug addiction that override the necessities of life.[279] In John Barton's case the necessity of food is replaced by the necessity of opium; for Esther the

[278] Kristeva, 4.
[279] Veblen, 83.

craving for alcohol has become the one necessity of life without which she cannot survive. Gwen Hyman notes that gin was considered "the lowest and most debased of nineteenth-century alcoholic drinks … consumed for no reason other than to get drunk"[280] and it is telling that it is gin that gives Esther at least a momentarily escape from the grim reality and the fatigues of her search for evidence in Harry Carson's murder: "Towards the middle of the day she could no longer evade the body's craving want of rest and refreshment; but the rest was taken in a spirit vault, and the refreshment was a glass of gin" (MB 277).

The opponents of women's factory work often used the dangers of the gin-shop as an example of its results. It was thought that if the wife was not at home to make it comfortable and inviting for the husband when he came home from work he would rather seek the pleasures of the gin-shop. This view is expressed in *Mary Barton* by Mrs Wilson who thinks women should not work after marriage:

> I could reckon up … nine men I know, as has been driven to th' public-house by having wives as worked in factories; good folk, too, as thought there was no harm in putting their little ones out at nurse, and letting their house go all dirty, and their fires all out; and that was a place as was tempting for a husband to stay in, was it? He soon finds out gin-shops, where all is clean and bright, and where th' fire blazes cheerily, and gives a welcome as it were. (MB 139)

In *Mary Barton*, the worse case scenario of what could happen to girls who work in factories is exemplified by Esther whose sexual and consequent social fall are implicitly blamed on the financial independence her work as a factory girl has given her; she has "no … sensible wants" and is able to spend her money "on dress" (MB 188) which results in her being first admired and then ruined by a soldier. Women working outside home went against the (middle-class) Victorian domestic ideology but as Kristine

[280] Gwen Hyman, *Making a Man: Gentlemanly Appetites in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009) 254. Sarah Freeman argues that gin "had had disreputable associations ever since it was first introduced to [Britain]" (97).

Swenson notes, for the working class it was often a financial necessity.[281] Today, alcoholism is seen as a disease but as John Burnett states, the widely accepted notion in the Victorian era was that "heavy drinking was a voluntary act, the result of moral failure and weakness of character, or as some teetotallers believed, of sin."[282] According to Brian Harrison, many Victorians and especially the Victorian temperance movement usually saw drinking as the cause that led to social degradation and not the effect of it.[283] From the Victorian point of view, Esther's fate can be seen as the result of the choices she has made and these choices do manifest an immoral disposition. Moreover, her alcoholism can be seen as the result of a sin; she has sinned heavily: first by giving in to sexual temptation and then becoming a prostitute proper; becoming addicted to drink could be seen as some kind of a punishment. The novel nevertheless presents Esther's drinking more as the result of her social degradation and the social isolation that is the consequence of it.

Drink, like opium, may deaden the pangs of hunger but neither gives the body the nutritional sustenance it needs to keep alive. When it comes to Esther, the craving for alcohol has replaced the craving for food to the extent that she can go without food, or shelter, but not without alcohol. She suffers from delirium tremens and dares not not to drink; in the end she is "nought but skin and bone, with a cough to tear her in two" (MB 461). The replacement of food with alcohol has made her a near skeleton but she is also suffering from consumption, or tuberculosis as it is called today, which accelerates her death. Consumption was also called the wasting disease, a name which is rather illustrative since the disease wastes away the flesh, that is, it makes the patient considerably thinner as if something was consuming the body from inside. In literary

[281] Kristine Swenson, "Protection or Restriction? Women's Labour in *Mary Barton*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 7 (1993) 54.
[282] Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures*, 129.
[283] Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971) 42.

representations consumption often has Romantic connotations for the something consuming the body was often understood as passion, and therefore a consumptive person was considered as having also a certain sexual appeal.[284] There was thus a gap between the Romantic literary image and the bodily reality and Esther's wasting away through starving and consumption is not Romantic but a grimly realistic picture of illness without cure.

Conclusions

Hunger in *Mary Barton* is the hunger of the poor working classes who have no sufficient social and economic power to be entitled to food. The representations of hunger and especially the references to hungry children exemplify the emerging humanitarian narrative and are used to engage the readers' sympathies. The novel tentatively attempts to challenge the early nineteenth-century views of the hungry as idle and morally deficient and responsible for their own state by presenting their starvation as a result of the flagging economy but the attempt is attenuated by representations which attribute animalistic behaviour to the hungry characters. These representations question the human status of the hungry characters and emphasise their otherness as regards to the middle- and upper-class culture. Yet it is also shown that the striking workers' hunger empowers them; it provides them with a way to try to control the employer-employee negotiations through their own bodies.

Meat, especially beef, has long been considered an emblem of Englishness; it is socially marked and gendered food connoting social and economic power and masculinity. In *Mary Barton*, the male working-class characters are afflicted twofold: the lack of meat in their diet excludes them from both the national and the masculine

[284] For a discussion on the connotations of certain illnesses, see Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987).

meat eating cultures. Even if the working-class John Barton's diet would never have included beef, the final absence of all kinds of meat, even the less potent bacon, from his diet reflects his exclusion of not only the masculine culture but the national one as well. Despite the efforts to root the industrial working class into the English soil by emphasising the provenance of their dialect, for example, John Barton's forced abstinence from meat accentuates his otherness as regards the national culture in which steaks are grilled and consumed as if an expression of allegiance to the shared imaginary culture of common Englishness. Tea is another substance which constructs and reconstructs national identity by creating an illusion of domestic comfort and a single tea-drinking nation. Nevertheless, my contention is that it is the herbal brew that one of the working-class characters, Alice Wilson, prepares, using herbs she picks herself, and consumes that epitomises Englishness and connotes domestic happiness in the novel.

To alleviate their and their children's hunger the working-class characters resort to opium as a food substitute. Like hunger and lack of meat in their diet, also opium and its use accentuate the otherness of the working-class poor; despite the widespread medical use of opium in the nineteenth century it also carried strong connotations of the barbaric other especially in its role as recreational drug. Although the representations of working-class opium use in the novel emphasise the role of opium as a remedy rather than a recreational drug, and attempt to contradict the nineteenth-century ideas concerning working-class opium use by presenting it as a social and economic problem rather than an individual failure, the representations themselves work as an antithesis, enforcing a negative connection between working class and opium. Similarly, the working-class consumption of alcohol, exemplified by John Barton's sister-in-law, Esther, a factory girl turned prostitute, is presented as a means to survive the grim

reality and to forget the death of her illegitimate child. Contrary to the general Victorian idea that working-class drinking was an indication of immoral character, my contention is that in *Mary Barton* drinking is presented as a consequence of social degradation rather than the reason for it. Interestingly, in Gaskell's other industrial novel, *North and South*, it is alcohol and not opium which is presented as a way to escape the grim reality. More poignantly, the hungry workers do not consume opium to alleviate their hunger but their food substitute is cotton fluff which fills not only their stomachs but also their lungs and slowly kills them.

4. *North and South*

Hunger: "Starving wi' dumb patience"

In *Mary Barton*, the hungry John Barton consumes opium to appease hunger and his sister-in-law Esther drowns both her sorrows and her hunger by consuming gin. Poignantly, in *North and South* working-class hunger is alleviated (unintentionally on the part of the mill owners) with a food substitute which appeases hunger but also slowly kills the consuming subject. The cotton mill workers are exposed to fluff, the particles that spread into the air when cotton is carded, and the working-class Bessy Higgins tells Margaret Hale how she worked in a carding room and how "the fluff got into my lungs and poisoned me. … [T]here's many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they're just poisoned by the fluff" (NS 102).[285] As a result of working in a mill Bessy is now suffering from what Margaret calls "consumption" (NS 156) but what in reality is probably a combination of byssinosis, a disease of the lungs caused by inhaling dust from textile fibres, and tuberculosis, and facing death at the age of nineteen; the fluff that she has been forced to incorporate invades her body 'poisoning' it gradually and filling up her lungs making it difficult to breath. Byssinosis causes tightness of chest but "spitting blood" is a classic symptom of consumption for which Bessy uses the now nearly obsolete term "waste"; thus the workers seem to be suffering from both byssinosis and consumption.[286] When Margaret enquires whether any measures are taken to improve the situation in the carding rooms Bessy explains that a wheel to blow away the fluff is considered too

[285] Engels also mentions the injurious effect of work in a carding room filled with dust from cotton (252).
[286] Katherine Byrne notes that in the nineteenth century, consumption was often used as a "blanket term" for various unidentified pulmonary diseases (Katherine Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 63).

expensive an investment by most of the employers especially when it "brings in no profit" (NS 102). It seems that replacing workers, or the human machinery, is cheaper than investing in a machinery that would prolong the lifespan of the workers and Bessy's and the other workers' fate represents one of the injustices of a system where the determining value is profit, as Jane Spencer puts it.[287] The employers' reluctance to spend money on something that would improve the working conditions reflects the impression Margaret gets of Mr Thornton's "sound economic principles" (NS 151) that rely on the nineteenth-century laissez-faire politics and which inspire her to accuse Thornton of acting "as if commerce were everything and humanity nothing" (NS 152) in his dealings with the working people.

Despite the fact that the inhaled fluff causes lung disease and even consumption, as in Bessy's case, some workers actually resist the installation of a wheel in the carding room because the poisonous fluff that fills the lungs also fills the stomach:

> I've heerd tell o' men who didn't like working in places where there was a wheel, because they said as how it made 'em hungry, after they'd been long used to swallowing fluff, to go without it, and that their wage ought to be raised if they were to work in such places. So between masters and men th' wheels fall through. (NS 102-3)

As Schor notes, the mutual dislike of the wheel ironically enough brings the masters and the men together in a meaning that reverses the purpose of the narrative: instead of solving social problems this coming together engenders new ones.[288] The dire economic circumstances force the hungry workers to replace food with fluff the consumption of which gives them a sense of being nourished for it takes away the feeling of hunger; like consuming opium, or suckling a withered breast, inhaling fluff substitutes for eating. Fluff is sham, or symbolic, food that only nourishes in the metaphorical sense

[287] Jane Spencer, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Macmillan, 1993) 90.
[288] Schor, 137.

but it is also lethal food for it poisons the body that incorporates it. Morbidly enough, the workers see the fluff as a perk, a free meal that the employer offers and which can only be replaced by money; in some sense the workers share the profit-driven point of view with the employers since for them the fluff is "food" that does not reduce their consuming power. Nevertheless, the fluff that the employers force-feed the workers with, to the extent that they, as Bessy puts it, can never get "the fluff out o' [their] throat i' this world" (NS 103), does not only fill their stomachs and in a way feed them but it also slowly consumes them. The victims of this force feeding do not gain weight and flesh but lose it as their consumptive bodies waste away.

When the middle-class Margaret Hale tells her "factory friend" (NS 156) Bessy that she is going to attend a dinner organised by the mill-owner Mr Thornton during the workers' strike, Bessy bitterly comments on how all the food that will be served there would be better used to feed the hungry mill workers whose "childer could na sleep at nights for th' hunger" (NS 150). Approaching criticism over the Thorntons' opulent dinner, where a large amount of food is available for the guests to pick and choose, she suggests an alternative: "Suppose Thornton's sent 'em their dinner out, – th' same money, spent on potatoes and meal, would keep many a crying babby quiet, and hush up its mother's heart for a bit!" (NS 149). The references to the starving children, presented as the ultimate victims of the uneven distribution of financial and social power are an example of the personal accounts and journalistic reports of hunger and starvation which aimed at creating humanitarian interest in the miseries of the hungry, especially the hungry poor. The representations of hunger and hungry characters in *North and South*, as in *Mary Barton*, can thus be seen not merely as devices used in social-problem narratives but closely linked with the rise of humanitarianism and the wider development in how human experience was presented in different discourses;

they are part of the practice of the eighteenth- and the nineteenth-century novels' use of humanitarian narrative to enforce "commitment to the reality of human suffering and to its claim for sympathy",[289] as Laqueur puts it. The narrator's vision of how the suffering workmen "would fain lie down and quietly die …[if the] clinging cries of the beloved and helpless" (NS 152) would not prevent them and how they "envied the power of the wild bird, that can feed her young with her very heart's blood" (NS 152) reports the extent the parents would go in their willingness to sacrifice themselves for their children. According to a pre-Christian legend a Pelican mother struck her breast to feed her young with her own blood during a famine to prevent them from starving. Christianity turned this into an allegory of the sacrifice Christ made on the cross: similar to the pelican, also Christ offers his blood, and flesh, metaphorically as food in the Communion. The Pelican feeding its young became also a common symbol of charity and in this sense the metaphorical image of the wild bird can be seen as a tool of the humanitarian narrative used to demand sympathy and charitable feelings from the readers.

Although Margaret is duly distressed, feeling "wicked and guilty in going to the dinner" (NS 149) while people are starving, she does attend it and her moral scruples and Bessy's budding criticism are downgraded by Bessy's fatalistic contention, a contention that Margaret does not question in any way, that the division of worldly goods such as food is somehow predestined: "Some's pre-elected to sumptuous feasts, and purple and fine linen, – may be yo're one on 'em. Others toil and moil all their lives long" (NS 149). Bessy's phraseology reveals indebtedness to Protestant religious discourse and consequently to the idea of a predetermined and unquestioned social and economic order sanctified by God. The ideas that hunger and starvation would be

[289] Laqueur, 180-1.

something out of the control of human beings and in some ways natural states to some but not to others, implied in Bessy's contention, were prevalent in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, in *North and South*, the mill workers are hungry and on the brink of starvation not because it would be their predetermined lot but because their hunger is part of a social and economic system in which some are more entitled to food in any given circumstances: the workers lack both economic and social power. The fact that food is plentiful on the middle-class Thorntons' dinner table manifests possession of control and entitlement and thus the Victorian power structures: the Thorntons and the other mill owners are in control of the money circulating in the manufacturing business and indirectly also partly in control of the food available in society.

In addition to demonstrating the miseries of the working-class poor, and especially those of their children, hunger and starvation in *North and South* are also presented as means to both gain access to and consolidate economic and social power; they are used as weapons in the conflict between the employers and the employees. When the mill workers take industrial action against the mill-owners, Bessy Higgins questions their decision by alluding to a previous strike which had not produced the desired results but during which they "all had to clem" (NS 133) and some, including her mother, had died. When the middle-class Margaret Hale asks Bessy's father Nicholas Higgins why they are now striking, he explains that the employers are cutting down the wages, expecting the employees to accept the fact, and claims that "[w]e'll just clem … to death first; and see who'll work for 'em then" (NS 133). Hunger and starvation are here seen as a means to protest against the employers' dictatorial economic power and, as in *Mary Barton*, the employees are engaging in a form of hunger strike to reach their goal. In *North and South*, the working-class characters are nevertheless presented as more self-conscious, as well as more articulate, about their

actions. When Margaret Hale suggests that starving to death might simply be seen as some kind of a revenge on the employers for not giving in to the workers' demands, a suggestion that reveals her middle-class frame of mind which can only partially understand the causes for such drastic measures, Nicholas Higgins equates voluntary starvation with a soldier's duty to die "at [his] post sooner than yield. That's what folk call fine and honourable in a soldier, and why not in a poor weaver-chap" (NS 134). When pointing out that "a soldier dies in the cause of the Nation – in the cause of others" (NS 134) Margaret is questioning the reasons and wisdom of voluntary starvation. In Nicholas' view, he would nevertheless be dying for his nation, albeit not the one Margaret refers to, but for the one comprised by the poor working classes; instead of dying for "somebody he never clapt eyes on, nor heerd on all his born days" (NS 134) he is starving for those of his fellow workers, such as his neighbour John Boucher, who are not able to support their families with the lower wages. Both Vernon and Laqueur note that the term *humanitarian* had depreciative connotations in the mid-nineteenth century, to be interested in the plight of people outside one's immediate environment was seen as excessive behaviour and even "moral perversion" as Laqueur puts it.[290] Nicholas's willingness to help his neighbours, both through self-starvation and with more tangible pecuniary help, and his refusal to consider his "cause" in any way lesser than the cause of the Nation, which seems but an abstract concept to him, echo the pejorative implications of nineteenth-century humanitarianism which was seen to care "more for those at a distance than for those near."[291]

Although the starvation of the workers is not wholly voluntary, the strategy of the union approaches that of a hunger strike with the emphasis on non-violence against the employers or the strike breakers. In *Sketches of Moral and Mental Philosophy*

[290] Vernon, 17 and Laqueur, 203.
[291] Laqueur, 203.

(1848) Thomas Chalmers argues that "[t]he sight of a human being in the agonies of hunger, would draw it [sympathy] most powerfully out in any quarter of the world"[292] and in the struggle for the sympathies of the onlookers the trade union hunger strike strategy relies on the idea of hunger being newsworthy and on the assumption that sympathy for the hungry would get the public opinion on their side: "there was to be no going again [sic] the law of the land. Folk would go with them if they saw them striving and starving wi' dumb patience" (NS 197-8). The workers in *North and South* strive to present themselves as the innocent and peaceful victims of the relentless profit-seeking employers, using hunger and starvation as form of speech trusted to be understood and sympathised with by the addressees: "Committee charged all members o' th' Union to lie down and die, if need were, without striking a blow; and then they reckoned they were sure o' carrying th' public with them" (NS 198). Starving is here a form of control that the working-class strikers use: by controlling their individual bodies and that way also their social body they attempt to control the public feeling and the flow of sympathy. After the strike the employers nevertheless turn the union's weapon against it by forcing the workers to relinquish all union activity and to shun those who will not by making "their men pledge 'emselves they'll not give penny to help th' Union or keep turn-outs fro' clemming" (NS 285). By forbidding the workers "to help the starving turn-out[s]" (NS 287) the employers are using their economic power to control the workers' social body by forcing the workers to control the others' individual starving bodies. Hunger thus becomes a weapon the employers use, for without the promise not to give financial or material support for the other starving workers they are in danger of starving themselves.

[292] Thomas Chalmers, *Sketches of Moral and Mental Philosophy: Their Connexion with Each Other; and Their Bearings on Doctrinal and Practical Christianity* (Edinburgh: Sutherland and Cox, 1848) 232. Chalmers was a minister of the Church of Scotland and later a professor of moral philosophy at St Andrews University.

For Nicholas Higgins the relationship between the employers and the employees is purely utilitarian; it is a relationship in which the employers wield the economic power because they are in charge of the economic resources: "Our business being … to take the bated wage, and be thankful; and their [the employers'] business to bate us down to clemming point, to swell their profits" (NS 134). Nevertheless, the strike is not so much about money as it is about "justice and fair play" (NS 134) and Nicholas boasts that the workers do not "want their brass so much this time, as we've done many a time afore. We'n getten money laid by" (NS 134). The increased economic inequality within the industrial working class is illustrated by the fact that Higgins is able to support himself and his two daughters easily with his present earnings, whereas the Boucher family struggles even when the father is working, and the decrease in salary and especially the diminished income during the strike are a disaster for them, leading to starvation: "Five shilling a week may do well enough for thee [Higgins], wi' but two mouths to fill, and one on'em a wench who can welly earn her own meat. But it's clemming to us" (NS 153).[293] If hunger and starvation are about entitlement as Sen suggests, then by starving voluntarily Nicholas Higgins is temporarily relinquishing his entitlement to food in order to gain it for his whole 'nation'. For Nicholas Higgins hunger is a tool he uses in the battle for the cause, and with money saved he or his family are not literally starving. On the other hand, for the Boucher family hunger is a condition imposed on them by the strike and by lack of any pecuniary resources which makes their starvation more palpable.

The diverse financial situations and the different degrees of hunger of the working-class families is further demonstrated by a discussion in which John Boucher accuses the trade union for the prolonged strike and also partly for the starving of his

[293] Interestingly, the character here uses 'meat' as a generic word for food, instead of bread which connoted food in *Mary Barton.*

children: “Thou saidst, Nicholas, in Wednesday sennight – and it’s now Tuesday i’ th’ second week – that afore a fortnight we’d ha’ the masters coming a-begging to us to take back our work, at our own wage – and time’s nearly up, – and there’s out lile Jack lying a-bed … an’ he lies clemming” (NS 153). Nicholas Higgins reacts to Boucher’s outburst by proposing a gesture of solidarity; he offers to buy food to feed his children, claiming that “[w]hat’s mine’s thine, sure enough, i’ thou’st i’ want” (NS 154) and Bessy assures Margaret who has been witnessing the discussion and gives her some money to be forwarded to the Bouchers that “[y]o’re not to think we’d ha’ letten ‘em clem, for all we’re a bit pressed oursel’; if neighbours doesn’t see after neighbours, I dunno who will” (NS 155). The doubts concerning trade unions’ operations expressed by Job Legh in *Mary Barton* are parallelled by John Boucher’s claim that the union is “a worser [sic] tyrant than e’ er th’ masters were” (NS 154) because its demands and the strike engender more hunger by preventing him to earn: “Clem to death … ere yo’ dare go again’ th’ Union” (NS 154). He also voices the general middle- and upper-class doubts about the trade union movement and the potential threat of revolutionary action it represented by commenting on the dangerous power of combination: “Yo’ may be kind hearts, each separate; but once banded together, you’ve no more pity for a man than a wild hunger-maddened wolf” (NS 154).

Although charity work was usual in the industrialised north in nineteenth-century England, in the novel the kind of middle-class charity that the Hales have been used to and have practised in their former home, the rural Helstone, does not seem to exist in the urban Milton-Northern. This is indicated in the surprised and suspicious reaction that Margaret Hale initially gets from Nicholas Higgins and his daughter when she suggests that she could visit them. In much the same way as Margaret has difficulties in comprehending the way Nicholas Higgins uses hunger and starvation to

express himself and to reach his goals, she and her parents have difficulties in comprehending the concepts of hunger and starvation in the Milton-Northern context. The basket of food Margaret's mother sends to the starving Boucher family, in the spirit of "the old Helstone habits" (NS 156), offers but temporary relief for hunger and starvation but from the masters' point of view, expressed by Thornton, it also "helped to prolong the struggle by assisting the turn-outs" (NS 157). The narrator seems to imply that this kind of isolated and disorganised help only works momentarily and points out that Margaret is if not ignorant at least short sighted when she is not concerned about the fact that the food given to the Bouchers might lengthen the strike: "Margaret did not care if their gifts had prolonged the strike; she did not think far enough for that" (NS 157).

When Mr Hale visits the Boucher family after they have received "the plenty provided by Mrs Hale, and somewhat lavishly used by the children, who were masters downstairs in their father's absence" (NS 157), and are therefore momentarily satiated, he fails to see the severity of the situation. Coming from the rural south and obviously considering the level of consumption as an indicator of social class Mr Hale is also slightly puzzled as to how to read the local working-class habits of consumption:

> I see furniture here which our [Helstone] labourers would never have thought of buying, and food commonly used which they would consider luxuries; yet for these very families there seems no other resource, now that their weekly wages are stopped, but the pawn-shop. One had need to learn a different language, and measure by a different standard, up here in Milton. (NS 158)

Mr Hale's wonder implies a certain amount of disapproval of consumption that exceeds the limits of what is deemed proper for a certain class's consumption. The fact that the workers spend money on furniture and food that could be considered luxuries, presumably meat among them, yet do not have any savings to resort to when no income

is available implies mismanagement of pecuniary resources. On the other hand, Margaret's nostalgic longing for the rural South has made her present an idealised image of it, but when John Boucher dies and Nicholas Higgins decides to take responsibility for the widow and the children and suggests moving there "where food is cheap and wages good, and all the folk, rich and poor, master and man, friendly like" (NS 299) she has to shatter the idealised picture of the South she has promoted. To make Nicholas change his mind she now attempts to give him a more realistic picture of the life of the agricultural labourers working in the fields, telling him that the pay is poor and not only would the physically exhausting and monotonous work "break you down" (NS 299) but also "[t]he fare is far different to what you have been accustomed to" (NS 299). Margaret points out that Nicholas could not afford his usual diet, "butcher's meat once a day, if you're in work" (NS 299), because his salary would scarcely support a family let alone buy meat every day. Nicholas finally rejects the idea of moving and considers the situation equally bad for a labourer, whether in the South or in the North: "North an' South have each getten their own troubles. If work's sure and steady theer, labour's paid at starvation prices; while here we'n rucks o' money coming in one quarter, and ne'er a farthing th' next" (NS 300). The furniture that workers in Milton buy can be seen as a kind of investment: it is property that can be cashed in when needed. In this case, Mr Hale's difficulty in interpreting the consumption habits of the working-class people of the industrialised, and commercialised North, implies inability to understand a society that is based on exchanging commodities and money. When it comes to food however, cashing in does not work and thus a working class character spending money on "luxuries" can be seen as engaging in conspicuous consumption.

Although the narrative does not strongly emphasise the relationship between extreme working-class hunger and animality, it does show how distress and starvation turns the striking workers into animal-like creatures. When the rebelling union members riot and force an entry into Mr Thornton's mill yard, enraged by his decision to import "poor Irish starvelings" (NS 172) to replace the striking workers, the narrative presents the furious working-class rioters as uttering a "fierce growl" (174) and making "noise [which is] inarticulate as that of a troop of animals" (176); the working-class poor are transformed into animals by their misery: they are "gaunt as wolves, and mad for prey" (176). Annette Cozzi notes that although hunger was only a "dim prospect" for the upper and middle classes, working-class hunger was seen as a "threat" to the social system because it could potentially lead to uprising and social instability.[294] The riot scene in the mill yard comes close to expressing the alleged threat the working class presented to the middle and upper classes: it realises "the *fear of violence*" that Raymond Williams sees as the hindrance to the process of sympathy in Victorian England.[295] Reversing the Marxist idea of the working class being sucked empty by the metaphorical bourgeois vampire the workers are transformed into vampire-like creatures thirsting after middle-class blood; even the mere voice of Mr Thornton is "like the taste of blood" (NS 173) to the rioters who "hearing him speak … set up a fierce unearthly groan" (173) as if already only half alive. The metaphorical consumption of the working-class poor is momentarily reversed for at the moment the rioters get a glimpse of Thornton they become the consumers hankering after food: "As soon as they saw Mr Thornton, they set up a yell, – to call it not human is nothing – it was as the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening" (NS 175). Unlike in *Mary Barton* where the hungry and starving workers are

[294] Cozzi, 41.
[295] Williams, *Culture and Society*, 90. Italics original.

presented as more or less helpless and passive sufferers, in *North and South* they are at least momentarily shown as a potential threat: an enraged mass of animal-like creatures ready to devour the defenceless representative of the bourgeoisie; the scene realises "the Victorian fear of working-class insurrection."[296] The act of consumption remains nevertheless abortive, for the intervention of the middle-class Margaret Hale to shield Mr Thornton from the rage of the rioters puts an end to the scene. She is wounded by a stone, thrown by one of the workers and aimed at Mr Thornton, and "the thread of dark-red blood … wakened them up from their trance of passion" (NS 178). In some sense the rioters get the taste of blood they yearn for, although it is drawn from "the innocent stranger" (177) rather than the immediate object of their hunger. According to Gary Day the human/animal dichotomy in *North and South* expresses the Victorian middle-class ideas about "self-mastery" according to which the marker of 'human', and thus civilised, was the ability to control oneself and one's feelings.[297] The rioting workers are presented as irrational animal-like creatures that do not contain their anger and frustration but let it out; the loss of self-control is manifest in the animalistic behaviour. As Day further points out, the novel "implies that workers can only be regarded as 'human beings' so long as they dutifully fulfil their economic function."[298] By striking, the workers refuse to fulfil their role in the prevalent economic system, that is the role of the labourers who will "take the bated wage, and be thankful" while the employers "swell their profits" (NS 134), and become less human in the process. In a sense, the hungry workers are enmeshed in the net of Victorian bourgeois ideology which does not leave them much choice between a starving human and a "wild beast" (NS 175).

[296] Gary Day, *Class* (London: Routledge, 2001) 122.
[297] Day, 137.
[298] Day, 139.

Consumption and Control: "Economical cooking"

When Margaret tells about the invitation to the Thorntons' dinner to Bessy Higgins she is amused and perhaps also slightly annoyed by Bessy's surprised reaction. According to Bessy, the Thorntons "visit wi' a' th' first folk in Milton" (NS 147) and from Bessy's, and from the Milton, point of view the Hales are not 'first folk' simply because they are not wealthy. As Bessy points out, "they thinken a deal o' money here; and I reckon yo've not getten much" (NS 147). In the industrial Milton, economic capital is a decisive factor when determining social position; it is more important than origins or education. The Hales do not have much money but according to Margaret they have something more valuable and more determining when it comes to social distinctions:

> [W]e are educated people, and have lived amongst educated people. Is there anything so wonderful, in our being asked out to dinner by a man who owns himself inferior to my father by coming to him to be instructed? I don't mean to blame Mr Thornton. Few drapers' assistants, as he was once, could have made themselves what he is. (NS 147)

Margaret claims equality with, and perhaps even superiority over, the representatives of economic capital. From her point of view it is the cultural capital, which she and her family possess that is worthier and more meaningful; at the same time the reference to Mr Thornton's humble origins imply her condescending attitude toward the new moneyed middle class whose inheritance includes neither cultural nor economic capital. Bourdieu notes how the educated middle class who are often "richer in cultural capital than in economic capital," frequently make the distinction between themselves and the moneyed middle class, or the nouveaux riches, "who have the economic means to

flaunt, with an arrogance perceived as 'vulgar', a life-style which remains very close to that of the working classes as regards economic and cultural consumption."[299]

In the nineteenth century, lavish and even ostentatious dinners became more usual among the English middle classes, especially among the nouveaux riches who were "anxious to demonstrate that humble origins did not imply a lack of culture and refinement."[300] For Margaret, "the sumptuousness of the dinner-table and its appointments" (NS 158) at the Thorntons' dinner does not express refinement but verges on vulgarity and articulates lack of sophistication:

> Margaret, with her London cultivated taste, felt the number of delicacies to be oppressive; one half of the quantity would have been enough, and the effect lighter and more elegant. But it was one of Mrs Thornton's rigorous laws of hospitality, that of each separate dainty enough should be provided for all the guests to partake, if they felt inclined. (NS 158-9)

Her cultural capital acquired as part of her birth and her background influences her concept of food consumption and entertaining guests; the large amount of food available clashes with what she has learnt to consider tasteful. The dinner table straddles the Bourdieuan border between the working-class preference for quantity and the bourgeois preference for quality for on the one hand it emphasises the working-class plenty and the importance of each guest having enough to eat and on the other hand it articulates the wish to please the guests' palates with delicacies and dainties. The sumptuous display of food is at the same time also a display of wealth and in this sense might be called vulgar. According to Joan Wildeblood and Peter Brinson, in the nineteenth century, vulgarity as a concept was increasingly used in connection with undesirable middle- or upper-class social behaviour, coarseness and ostentation for example, rather than lower-class habits. It was considered "the greatest social crime" in

[299] Bourdieu, 185.
[300] Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 77.

Victorian Britain, especially among the middle classes who desperately wanted to act properly and avoid being classed as vulgar.[301] The fact that the dinner is not an exception but more a rule in the social circles within which the Thorntons move is indicated by Mr Thornton who agrees with his mother on the principle of socialising: "Careless to abstemiousness in her daily habits, it was part of [Mrs Thorntons'] pride to set a feast before such of her guests as cared for it. Her son shared this feeling. He had never known … any kind of society but that which depended on an exchange of superb meals" (NS 159). The insistence on the amount of food is based on the wish to satisfy the guests' appetite or desire for any particular article of food rather than the wish to satisfy their hunger, or need for food, and the sumptuous meal offered is thus also an expected social performance, reminiscent of potlatch, that shows the economic power of the family. Potlatch or ceremonial gift exchange is about giving and attempting to outgive and the dinners given in *North and South*, the more subtle displays of wealth and social position in the London house of Margaret's aunt and the lavish manifestations of the consuming power of the Thorntons' social circle in Milton-Northern, can be seen as such; by participating in the potlatch and accepting the gifts given the recipients also accept the givers' social and economic pretensions.

The clash between Margaret's ideas of entertainment, derived from the fashionable London society, and those of the Thorntons is a clash between two different attitudes to food and consumption influenced by the possession of two different kinds of capital: cultural and economic. Although technically both the Hales and the Thorntons belong to the middle class it is obvious that there is a difference not only in their ideas of social conduct but also in the way they perceive the world. This reflects the fluctuations and fine lines of the socially mobile Victorian society where there was "a

[301] Joan Wildeblood and Peter Brinson, *The Polite World: A Guide to English Manners and Deportment from the Thirteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965) 39.

tier of middle classes" rather than a single homgeneous middle class.[302] Margaret's criticism of the Thorntons' 'vulgarity' when it comes to food consumption is a reflection of not only her concept of what is proper but it is also an attempt to control both her own and the Thorntons' social identity. When books of etiquette, cook books, or inherited knowledge about dining habits express implicit or explicit instructions on how to prepare and consume food, they are not just sustaining patterns of consumption but also creating them. As Natalie Kapetanios Meir points out, in the nineteenth century dining discourse, formal dining conventions were made to appear natural rather than the products of a certain culture.[303] Thus not to follow the convention would have been unnatural, an indication of social otherness.

Julie Fromer notes that when Mr Thornton is invited to have tea with the Hales, in addition to establishing a new kind of connection between them, the occasion signifies a "renegotiation of their relative social identities."[304] The renegotiation concerns their identities as a pupil and a tutor as well as their social identities as a wealthy mill-owner and an impoverished clergyman. Not only does the tea reflect the ideal middle- and upper-class social ritual but it is also an expression of the Hales' class position within the Milton society, concerned more with one's economic than cultural capital. On the other hand, when Margaret Hale invites the working-class Nicholas Higgins to have something to eat instead of "a sup o'drink" (NS 217) he intends to have after the death of his daughter Bessy, and he ends up having tea and a talk with her father, the occasion signifies not the renegotiating of social positions but more an attempt to control his consumption. To keep Nicholas from drinking, Margaret offers Higgins domestic comforts and "some comfortable food" (NS 218) to rival the comfort

[302] Burnett, *Plenty and Want*, 76.
[303] Natalie Kapetanios Meir, "'A Fashionable Dinner is Arranged as Follows': Victorian Dining Taxonomies," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33.1 (2005) 133.
[304] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 132-3.

derived from alcohol and when she has a moment of regret for the invitation she still pursues it for she realises that "if she drew back now, it would be worse than ever – sure to drive him to the gin-shop" (NS 218). Harrison points out how the working-class home was often cramped and without comforts, with or without a wife at home, and therefore the temptation of drink and the society of a drinking place was often unavoidable.[305] Bessy Higgins had seen it as her duty to control her father's drinking and after Bessy dies Margaret assumes the responsibility by taking Nicholas Higgins home with her.

Gary Day points out that the Victorian middle-class attempts to control working-class consumption and especially drinking reflected the wish to control the social body and to mould the working class according to the middle-class ideals and values. The working-class leisure activities of drinking, "feasting and brawling … stimulated the body rather than the mind" and therefore dragged the working class down into the sphere of an animal.[306] In fact, Engels argues that drinking is the only pleasure, together with "sexual licence", which the bourgeois society has to offer to the subjugated working class and which is taken into extremes by the lack of other meaningful ways to enjoy life.[307] In the novel, the "malt liquor" (NS 378) sent to the haymakers in the rural south is a refreshment and a traditional way to quench thirst but the use of alcohol in the urban north is given another meaning: alcohol is presented as a way to escape the monotonous and grim factory life. When Bessy Higgins casually notes to Margaret Hale that her father will need "a' the comfort he can get out o'either pipe or drink" (NS 135) to stay calm through the troubles and therefore she is trying to "keep father at home, and away fro' the folk that are always ready for to tempt a man, in time o'strike, to go drink" (NS 136), Margaret assumes that Bessy's father is a drunkard. Her assumption

[305] Harrison, 46.
[306] Day, 137-8.
[307] Engels, 208.

implies what Brian Harrison sees as the Victorians' failure to make the difference between occasional drinking and alcoholism.[308] It also reflects the nineteenth-century view on alcohol abuse: like opium abuse it too was seen as a working-class vice, a failure of moral virtue. Bessy nevertheless does not see her father's drinking as a personal moral problem but more as part of a larger social phenomenon: the monotony of every day life requires "a bit of fillip" (MB 135). She explains how she herself has sometimes bought bread from a different baker just for the stimulus of something different to eat and similarly some need the "gin-shop for to make their blood flow quicker, and more lively" (MB 135). According to Bessy her

> father never was a drunkard, though maybe, he's got worse for drink, now and then. Only yo'see,… at times o'strike there's much to knock a man down, for all they start so hopefully; and where's the comfort to come fro'? He'll get angry and mad – they all do – and … maybe ha' done things in their passion they'd be glad to forget. (MB 135)

Alcohol is thus seen as a mental comfort as well as a means to forget. It is not presented as a recreational drug but as a kind of respite from the harsh everyday life.

The middle-class control over the working-class consumption is further illustrated by the Hepworths who succeed the Hales in the vicarage at Helstone. They are fulfilling the usual duties of the Victorian clerical families by being occupied with both the mental and the physical well being of the parishioners; they are representatives of what Dorice Williams Elliott calls the new Victorian "professional clergy" who saw their role in the community as more active than that of the old "gentleman clergy."[309] The Hepworths represent the change that has happened in Helstone during Margaret's absence; a change towards a more modern and 'businesslike' society. Mr Hepworth does not content himself with mere instruction on the dangers of alcohol but actively

[308] Harrison, 21.
[309] Dorice Williams Elliott, "The Female Visitor and the Marriage of Classes in Gaskell's *North and South*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 49.1 (1994) 35-6.

tries to control and even prevent the consumption of alcoholic beverages: "He'll be after the men's cans in the hay-field, and peeping in; and then there'll be an ado because it's not ginger-beer" (NS 378). The Hepworths "are stirring people" (NS 378) as one of the villagers tells Margaret when she visits Helstone after two years of absence: "The new Vicar is a teetotaller, miss, … and his wife has a deal of receipts for economical cooking, and is for making bread without yeast" (NS 378). Mr Hepworth's concern about the use of alcoholic beverages and Mrs Hepworth's recommendations for food consumption in form of recipes, presumably appropriate for the use of the working class, are a manifestation of the control over the working-class consumption. The word 'economical' implies the idea that without Mrs Hepworth's control and instruction the working class parishioners are not fully capable of consuming in a manner appropriate to their income, or able to use their income appropriately, tenets expressed in numerous publications such as *The Family Economist* which were targeted at the labouring classes and strove to educate them in the proper manner of consuming.[310]

Control over the working-class consumption in *North and South* is manifest also in Mr Thornton's dining-room scheme towards the end of the novel. He builds a dining room adjacent to his mill and hires a cook to provide the workers with a decent dinner. This is not a charitable scheme for the workers pay for their food and the facilities. The idea of a common dining room is inspired by a visit Thornton pays to one of his workers: "I saw such a miserable black frizzle of a dinner – a greasy cinder of meat, as first set me a-thinking. But it was not till provisions grew so high this winter that I bethought me how, by buying things wholesale, and cooking a good quantity of provisions together, much money might be saved, and much comfort gained" (NS 352-

[310] In the vein of Mrs Hepworth the celebrity chefs of the nineteenth century, too, thought it necessary to emphasise the social division of consumption by publishing cookbooks targeted at different social classes; the first cookbooks meant solely for use in the working-class kitchen and with the emphasis on the word 'economical' were published in the mid-nineteenth century.

3). The dining-room scheme is an enlightened and philantropic scheme meant to benefit the workers but at the same time it also expresses a patronising middle-class attitude to working-class consumption and food preparation skills. Without Thornton's help, the working-class meal is "frizzle" and "cinder" as opposed to the "hot-pot" (NS 354) served by the matron in the mill. Although the workers pay for the provisions themselves it is Thornton who is in control of the purchases. The dining-room, as well as the use of a 'matron', places the workers' food consumption in controlled circumstances and thus disciplines their social body. In the Victorian context, the dining-room scheme is a less radical version of Robert Owen's idea of "agricultural villages" where no private kitchens are needed but where all cooking and consuming of food happens in a separate building, common to all inhabitants, where they "will eat together as one family." According to Owen, this mode of communal food consumption would provide the inhabitants with "food at far less expense and with much more comfort than by any individual or family arrangements".[311]

In both the southern and the northern cases of generosity, or even philanthropy, it is a question of power, whether social or economic but what is different is the degree of obligation to reciprocate, to give back. The Hepworths and the Hales belong to a social group which is obliged "to give without taking"[312]; they are destined to give for it is part of the social duties of those socially and/or economically 'better off'. In *North and South*, if one leaves aside the philanthropy practised within the working classes, that is, the financial and mental help given by a member of the working classes to one another, then what Berking calls negative reciprocity is the domain of those who have

[311] Robert Owen, *The Report to County Lanark* (Glasgow: Wardlaw & Cunninghame, 1821) 35. Owen was a social reformer and a mill owner who established a model community at New Lanark in Scotland which was centred on his cotton mills and based on principles of cooperation. His plans for the communal food consumption were never realised in New Lanark due to the opposition of his partner William Allen, a Quaker, who objected to Owen's deism. Owen influenced the formation of the British trade union movement and is often considered the founder of British socialism.
[312] Berking, 38.

more cultural than economic capital. The representatives of the economic capital, the mill owners, are described as considering their relationship with the working classes as mainly an economic relationship which is based on exchange of money for labour. It is claimed that this kind of relationship brings more independence to and less interference with the workers' lives, albeit only outside the working hours. Mr Thornton argues that there would be "no degradation greater than that of having another man perpetually directing and advising and lecturing me" (NS 121) and even here the North and the South are juxtaposed for in the novel the Southern philanthropy is characterised by the Hepworths' intrusions into the parish members' lives both during and outside their working hours. When Thornton points out that he has "no right to obtrude [his] views, of the manner in which he shall act, upon another… merely because he has labour to sell and I capital to buy" (NS 122), Margaret Hale argues that it is not the "labour and capital positions" that should define the relationships between mill-owners and the workers but those of human beings dealing with other human beings: "God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent" (NS 122). Her view is obviously infused with her nostalgic longing for the rural Helstone which in addition to being home for her is also an image of "an enclave where all social relationships are personal: a large, isolated family."[313] In this sense it is the opposite of the industrial North where the social relationships are largely defined by the "cash nexus" (NS 420).

Philanthropy in the form of charitable acts has roots in the religious duty of giving alms to the poor, but also in the idea of charity as benevolence and sympathy towards other human beings. The idea of benevolence as a moral virtue was a central theme in the eighteenth-century moral philosophy; as Berking points out, Kant for example thought that benevolence and sympathy were at the centre of behaviour

[313] Gallagher, 178.

conducive not only to the happiness of others but also to the moral "perfection" of oneself.[314] Benevolence and charitable actions are about giving and one could argue that they are moral obligations whereas taking is an economic one. Behind the ideals of philanthropy lie nevertheless the less idealistic implications of control and expectancy of obedience. Without any concrete measures to improve the life of the working classes, for example, in the form of education or the possibility to influence their income they would stay dependent on philanthropy. Berking argues that "[r]eciprocity and exchange are not the same", claiming that reciprocity is defined by maintaining social relations whereas exchange is more about economic relations.[315] This division can be used to analyse the Hepworths' and the Thornton's cases of philanthropy. In the case of the Hepworths and the Hales it is more the question of giving and reciprocating: they give without expecting to get anything back immediately, other than gratitude and obedience. Their philanthropy is more about social relations and the social order of things whereas the Thornton's dining room is more about exchange, albeit not in a very explicit way.

Mr Thornton claims that he does not want the dining room scheme "to fall into charity" (NS 354) and consequently the workers pay for the provisions and for the facilities and as an exchange they get a hot meal and a place to eat it. As an exchange for his generosity Mr Thornton can expect things back; he can expect loyalty but in the spirit of economic transaction also a more efficient and physically able workforce which affects the production in a positive and productive manner. Every now and then Thornton shares the meal with his employees but he is careful to go only when invited so as not to "intrude[…] on them" (NS 354); when the workers invite him to eat with them and he accepts their invitation the social boundaries between them blurr, even if only momentarily. Margaret Visser points out that "eating together with members of a

[314] Berking, 134.
[315] Berking, 37.

group proves loyalty to that group, and signifies a willingness to serve its interests in the future."[316] When sharing a meal with his employees Thornton could thus be seen as aligning himself with them; sharing a meal is an indication that the interests of the mill owner and the mill workers could be seen as common.

Sharing food is a way to communicate and as Rosemarie Bodenheimer notes, the dining room in the Thornton mill becomes "a tentative forum for discussion" between Thornton and his employees,[317] albeit one has to point out that the discussion during the meal is "steered clear of all vexed questions" (NS 354). Bodenheimer further points out that the dining-room serves as a kind of an equaliser between Thornton and his employees for it is a place where "the principles of deference and leadership are not acknowledged by either class."[318] When hearing of Thornton's experiment, Margaret Hale's godfather, Mr Bell, notes that there is "[n]othing like the act of eating for equalizing men" (NS 354) and the dining-room also serves as a social meeting place for different classes. The dining-room scheme can thus be seen as a suggestion for a solution to the problems of the industrialised north akin to that offered in *Mary Barton*. In *Mary Barton* the solution is seen in the mutual recognition and understanding of each other; in *North and South* the dining-room scheme can be seen as the climax of the mill-owner's and his employees' attempt to understand each other, and especially of Thornton's recognition of the individuality and humanity of his employees. Nevertheless, as it is clear that "vexed questions" (NS 354) will not be addressed in these shared meals, it seems that even if the solution is more efficient than that in *Mary Barton* it remains tentative as long as real issues are not discussed by both parties. Accordingly, the dining-room scheme is called an "experiment" (NS 354) by Thornton.

[316] Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991) 84.
[317] Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 59
[318] Bodenheimer, 59.

Marjorie Garson notes that the dining room scheme is an echo of the concept of "society as a family" that Margaret embraces and that Thornton's tentative sharing of Margaret's vision is an indication of him developing into a character worthy of marrying her.[319]

A Basket of Fruits

The development of Mr Thornton into a suitable match for Margaret especially in the eyes of the Hale family is also reflected in the gifts of fruit he brings in to satisfy the ill Mrs Hale's craving for fresh fruit. The careful specification of fruit in the narrative draws the reader's attention, especially because the food that the characters consume is rarely specified. On the occasion of Mr Thronton's visit to the Hales, the description of the tea-table "on which flourished the cocoa-nut cakes, and a basket piled with oranges and ruddy American apples, heaped on leaves" (NS 79) specifies not only the colours but also the origins of the fruit.[320] The tea-table is "decked out" (NS 79) rather than set and the coconut cakes and the fruit 'flourish' on the table as if on display; it presents a scene with feminine and exotic connotations giving an idea of an aesthetically constructed scene or even a still-life with the colours white, orange, red and green rather than a table laden with food and drink.[321] The contents of the table, the imported oranges and the more exotic coconut, American apples, and tea, reflect not only middle- and upper-class tea-table aesthetics which required that fruit "should be tastefully

[319] Garson, 326. Judith Newton argues that the novel suggests that the solution to class conflict would be "not radical economic alteration but feminine influence" (Judith Lowder Newton, *Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860*, New York: Methuen, 1985, 165). Thus the dining room scheme and Thornton's altered attitude to his employees can be seen as results of Margaret's growing influence on him.

[320] In *Feeding the Victorian City: the Food Supply of Manchester, 1770-1870*, Roger Scola notes although apples were the most common fruit sold in fruit markets in Victorian Manchester, for instance, imported American apples were usually a middle-class treat (Roger Scola, *Feeding the Victorian City: the Food Supply of Manchester, 1770-1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) 121. In December 1861, Gaskell wrote to the family's American friend in Boston, a Unitarian minister Edward Hale, thanking for Christmas presents he had sent among which were "two barrels of apples" which had arrived "in very good condition" (*Further Letters*, 228).

[321] Coconut cakes, made of sugar, eggs and shredded coconut, are sweet and airy, they are both light and unsubstantial as food, that is, they do not have much nutritional value and as sweet food they have feminine connotations

arranged … with leaves between and round"[322] but also the British imperialist enterprise, the source of many middle- and upper-class families' wealth.

When contemplating the tea-table and the drawing room Mr Thornton sees it as a reflection of the Hale family and particularly of Margaret Hale: "It appeared to Mr Thornton that all these graceful cares were habitual to the family; and especially of a piece with Margaret" (NS 80). Margaret, and her parents, are not autochthonous to Milton or Northern England and are thus as much (exotic) imports from Mr Thornton's point of view.[323] In some ways, the drawing room is also a piece of Helstone in the midst of the urban Milton a fact that is reflected in the display of nature in one corner of the room where stands "a tall white china vase, from which drooped wreaths of English ivy, pale-green birch and copper-coloured beech-leaves" (NS 79). It is nature brought inside, albeit in an aesthetical composition, reflecting Margaret's nostalgic yearning and home-sickness for the natural world of the South of England. On the other hand, the Thornton drawing-room with its "pink and gold" (NS 112) walls as observed by Margaret on a visit seems uninhabited although it is filled with furniture and ornamental objects; the room reflects the urban environment of the whole house which is located on the same courtyard as the mill that Mr Thornton operates and the only thing reminiscent of nature is "the pattern on the carpet [which] represented bunches of flowers on a light ground" (NS 112). Ironically enough, even this pattern is partly invisible under a colourless linen cover used to prevent the colours fading.

A garden and especially fruit also mark Margaret Hale's relationship with Henry Lennox, her cousin Edith's brother-in-law, whom she has befriended at her aunt's house in London. The scene in the garden of her Helstone home with its connotations of the

[322] Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management*, 1861, (London: Cassell, 2000) 801.
[323] There are further connections of Margaret with exotic products. At the beginning of the novel she serves as a mannequin for Indian shawls whose "spicy Eastern smell" (NS 5) she inhales and later she wears one; when dressed up for a dinner party she wears a coral necklace and hairpins and later has pomegranate flowers in her hair

Garden of Eden and the expulsion symbolises a certain kind of fall or rather loss of innocence for Margaret. Barbara Leah Harman notes that for Margaret Helstone represents home, an Edenic haven into which "sexual love and religious dissent" enter, shattering the image of paradise.[324] Sexual love enters the Eden via Henry Lennox who during his visit to Helstone confesses his love and proposes to Margaret. When Mr Hale proposes fruit for a dessert after lunch, instead of the "biscuits and marmalade, and what not, all arranged in formal order on the sideboard" (NS 28) in the dining room, Henry Lennox suggests that they go out into the garden and eat it there: "Nothing is so delicious as to set one's teeth into the crisp, juicy fruit, warm and scented by the sun" (NS 29). The sexual connotations of the eating of the fruit signifies his willingness to consume something else than just the fruit and when he proposes to Margaret in the garden the proposal implies that he sees her as ready to be consumed sexually. Eating and sexual intercourse both imply incursion and incorporation for both acts blur, as Pasi Falk points out, "the bodily boundaries separating the inside from the outside."[325] Henry Lennox's proposal shatters Margaret's idea of herself and disturbs her self image: "Margaret felt guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage" (NS 34). She declines the proposal and tells Henry Lennox that "I don't like to be spoken to as you have been doing" (NS 30). For a nineteenth-century woman, especially a middle- and upper-class woman, entering marriage meant also entering a sexual relationship. Declining the marriage proposal means also declining a sexual role but Margaret is nevertheless forced to consider herself in this light and this

[324] Barbara Leah Harman, *The Feminine Political Novel in Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia 1998) 56.
[325] Pasi Falk, "Homo culinarius: towards an historical anthropology of taste." *Social Science Information* 30.4 (1991), 780. Maggie Kilgour notes that sexual intercourse, like eating "makes two bodies one, though in a union that is fortunately less absolute and permanent" (Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, 7). In nineteenth-century England marriage also meant social incorporation for the husband and the wife became one in the eyes of the law and the society: the woman's identity was subsumed into the man's and in this sense marriage was a cannibalistic act where the male party incorporated the female party.

'sexual knowledge' causes the loss of what Harman calls her "maiden innocence."[326] The proposal indicates the loss of childhood innocence and in this sense causes an expulsion from the Eden.

When Mr Hale insists on having pears, or more specifically "brown beurrés" (NS 28) as dessert, Coral Lansbury contends that his "impulse for pears" is one of the feminine traits used to define the character.[327] Nevertheless, while it is true that he has many characteristics often considered stereotypically feminine, such as being emotional, and even having feminine looks, I would argue that his sudden yearning for pears implies something else. Eating fruit out in the garden, straight from the tree, represents here a wish to escape into a certain kind of innocence, even if momentarily. The informality of the fruit dessert, eaten outside, signifies a distance from the formalities of dining and responsibilities of adult life. When Margaret gathers the pears she makes an aesthetic arrangement of them; she "made a plate for the pears out of a beet-root leaf, which threw up their brown gold colour admirably" (NS 29). Henry Lennox nevertheless "looked more at her than at the pears" (NS 29) and indeed neither he nor Margaret are noted as actually consuming any of the fruit. While Henry Lennox prefers to look at his daughter instead of the fruit, Mr Hale on the other hand, "inclined to cull fastidiously the very zest and perfection of the hour he had stolen from his anxiety, chose daintily the ripest fruit, and sat down on the garden bench to enjoy it at his leisure" (NS 29). With the fruit that he carefully picks up from the impromptu plate he also picks up almost greedily a moment of innocent pleasure that he knows will not last. His moment of innocence is complete for he is utterly unaware of the love scene enacted around him and when Margaret and Henry Lennox return to him from their round of the garden, he "had not yet finished the pear, which he had delicately peeled in

[326] Harman, 56.
[327] Lansbury, 116.

one long strip of silver-paper thinness, and which he was enjoying in a deliberate manner" (NS 32).

Mr Hale is thus clinging on to the last moments of innocence that he is providing for himself but also for his daughter and his wife. His decision to leave the church for reasons of conscience occasions another fall from innocence for Margaret. His decision ultimately expels Margaret from her paradise of innocent belief in the conformity of her and her father's ideas about religion: "The one staid foundation of her home, of her idea of her beloved father, seemed reeling and rocking" (NS 36). His religious dissent entails moving away from Helstone and to a place that would remind him of it as little as possible. Being forced to leave Helstone Margaret is also forced to leave the idyllic pastoral way of life she considers the essence of Helstone life and which for her is the Edenic home. The move to Milton-Northern thus expels her from the garden of Helstone and exposes her to knowledge of the suffering and hunger of the industrial working class.

Fruit also plays a role in the developing relationship between Mr Thornton and Margaret Hale, as well as the whole Hale family. The basket of fruit Mr Thornton takes to Margaret's mother Mrs Hale, who is seriously and incurably ill, reflects Mr Thornton's superior financial circumstances; it is an act of gift giving but also a way to establish and maintain a certain kind of social relationship with the Hale family. Whether reciprocity is expected is difficult to say, although one could argue that the basket of fruit is amply reciprocated in the form of not only Margaret's love but also in the form of her fortune at the end of the novel. Mr Thornton notes to Mrs Hale's doctor "that money is not very plentiful" (NS 210) in the Hale household and therefore he offers to procure "any comforts or dainties she [Mrs Hale] ought to have" (NS 210). Mrs Hale is not in need of nourishment necessary for her to survive but of 'comforts

and dainties'; the fruit are meant not to feed Mrs Hale but offer her titbits that would please her palate and boost her morale.

The doctor tells Mr Thornton that the patient "craves for fruit … but jargonella pears will do as well as anything, and there are quantities of them in the market" (NS 211). The jargonella pears were a common household fruit in Victorian England and the 'will do' here refers to consumption level that would agree with the Hales' financial circumstances: because the jargonella pears are in season there is a large supply which lowers their price. In the narrative they also connote the Hales' financial decline and their new life in Milton, comparing unfavourably with the pears grown and consumed in the Helstone garden. For Mr Thornton 'will do' is nevertheless not enough and he "went straight to the first fruit-shop in Milton, and chose out the bunch of purple grapes with the most delicate bloom upon them, – the richest coloured peaches, – the freshest vine-leaves" and has them "packed into a basket" (NS 211) which he himself takes to the Hale house. Yet the care with which Mr Thornton picks out the fruit and the obligatory foliage to accompany them, paying attention to their colour and appearance and even the freshness of the ornamental greenery, as if a painter of a "Fruit-piece"(NS 209) would, seems uncharacteristic of him.[328] He has been presented as a businessman whose values are utilitarian rather than aesthetic yet his choice of these 'dainties' to be presented to Mrs Hale is based on their appearance rather than their nutritional or taste value, or indeed their market value. Difficult to grow and maintain in the English climate, neither grapes nor peaches would have been available "in quantities". These fruits would have been imported or grown in hothouses at a great expense and would thus be luxury not only because of their value as rarity, and because chosen with more

[328] "Fruit-piece" is actually the title of the chapter 27 in which the first basket of fruits is given. The title links the chapter with the earlier description of the Hales' drawing room with its still-life-like tea-table and a 'flower-piece'.

consideration to Mrs Hale's desire rather than need, but also because they would have been expensive.

The whole process of personally acquiring the fruit and selecting the best of them and putting them in a basket, as well as delivering them personally, is a process of transformation whereby fruits as edible commodities become fruits as a gift. Although Mr Thornton omits the verbal labelling of the gift, and only refers to "bringing" (NS 211) fruit to Mrs Hale, the basket and the vine leaves, along with the superior quality of the fruits, physically label them as a gift. And the Hales acknowledge the transformation of fruits into gifts when Mr Hale gives the basket of fruit a verbal label by calling it a "gift of … delicious fruit" (NS 212). Yet when wrapping, in other words the physical label, is removed and the fruit are lifted out from the 'wrapping' and eaten they are transformed back to edible commodities.

The gifts of fruit, which seem to be very liberal ones, can be regarded as emotionally charged actions which create and sustain an emotional attachment between the giver and the receivers. When Mrs Hale points out that Margaret does not seem to like Mr Thornton very much and seems rather "prejudiced" (NS 212) against him, Mr Hale notes to Margaret that if "[I] had any prejudices, the gift of such delicious fruit as this would melt them all away" (NS 212). Later, after another gift of fruit, Mrs Hale confesses how she is getting to like Mr Thornton and how "he is really getting quite polished in his manners" (NS 232). Mr Thornton's relationship with the Hale family has changed during the narration; it begins by being a purely economic one between a paying student and a paid tutor but comes closer to a social relationship, and even a friendship. The position of Mr Thornton as regards the Hale family develops, if not due to at least with the help of the gifts of fruit, into that of "a friend's position" in both the mind of Margaret "as well as in that of the rest of the family" (NS 235).

The narrator points out that Mr Thornton's action of bringing gifts to Mrs Hale and to the Hale household is somehow out of his character for he "had no general benevolence, – no universal philanthropy; few even would have given him credit for strong affections" (NS 211) and therefore good deeds would not be habitual for him. His capacity for 'strong affections' has nevertheless been shown: he is not only strongly attached to his mother but his passionate feelings for Margaret Hale have also become quite clear during the narrative. His motive for giving the fruit to Mrs Hale can, however, be seen as a common courtesy since he has visited the Hale house several times for his tutorials with Mr Hale. Nevertheless, if gifts are a manifestation of the giver's feelings, as Cheal argues,[329] then the basket of fruits can be seen as expressing Mr Thornton's compassionate feelings towards the Hales in general and towards Margaret in particular. Since Mr Thornton cannot hope to gain any economic power from his generous act, the power the gift exchange gives him is moral by nature; the gifts are shown as giving Mr Thornton a moral upper hand in his relationship with Margaret. The gifts are given in the aftermath of Margaret's rejection of Mr Thornton's confession of love and proposal of marriage, a confession and a rejection that leave Mr Thornton mortified. In Mr Thornton's mind his gesture is intertwined with his feelings about Margaret and the memory of the rejection; he is convincing himself that what he does he does in spite of his own and Margaret's feelings:

> I will not be daunted from doing as I choose by the thought of her. I like to take this fruit to the poor mother, and it is simply right that I should. She shall never scorn me out of doing what I please. A pretty joke indeed, if, for fear of a haughty girl, I failed in doing a kindness to a man I liked! I do it for Mr Hale; I do it in defiance of her. (NS 211)

[329] Cheal, 99.

First it seems that his generous gesture is done for Mrs Hale but then he assures himself that it is done for Mr Hale. Despite his assurance that he gives his gift despite Margaret, after all the fruit basket is given "in defiance of her", it can nevertheless be argued that Margaret is the ultimate motivation for his good deed. His bringing in the fruit is an indication of not only his generous nature but also of his feelings as a rejected suitor, the gifts are not only a token of sympathy but also a way of obtaining moral power. His kind treatment of especially Mrs Hale is contrasted by his avoidance of any communication with Margaret to the extent of ignoring her, a treatment that according to the narrator involuntarily works to Mr Thornton's advantage by making Margaret regret the harsh way she received his avowal of love and proposal. In Mr Thornton's mind his own behaviour is akin to a moral victory over his own feelings and over Margaret for "he was proud of the sense of justice which made him go on in every kindness he could offer to her parents. He exulted in the power he showed in compelling himself to face her, whenever he could think of any action which might give her father or mother pleasure" (NS 235).

The repeated "offering of fruit" (NS 232) that Mr Thornton brings into the Hale household is also a form of courting as it is a means for Mr Thornton to enter the Hales' drawing-room and get a glimpse of Margaret: "He could not – say rather, he would not – deny himself the chance of the pleasure of seeing Margaret. He had no end in this but the present gratification" (NS 232). While satisfying Mrs Hale's craving for fresh fruit he is also satisfying his own craving for seeing Margaret. It can be argued that the gift of fruit is a form of worship, an "offering" that is presented to Margaret via her mother. It can also be seen as inscribing the myth of Pomona, the goddess of fruit trees and gardens in Roman mythology, whose attribute in art iconography is often a basket of

fruit.[330] To keep off unwanted suitors Pomona builds a fence around her orchard but one of the suitors, Vertumnus, after trying different disguises finally gains entrance disguised as an old woman. Under his disguise he tries to persuade Pomona to marry him and after failing finally reveals himself. Seeing his good looks Pomona falls in love with him and accepts him as a suitor. In *North and South*, after the initial invitation to tea in the Hales' drawing-room where he registers the fruit arrangement in the basket as one of the things in the room which are "of a piece with Margaret" (NS 80) Mr Thornton enters the Hale household under the guise of a student, a benefactor and if not quite a gentleman at least close to one, and at the end of the narrative he does gain access to the orchard when he proposes again and Margaret accepts. The fruit might be meant to soften Margaret's heart but they seem to affect more her parents and work almost like a bribe.

The fruit does taste delicious but the fruit basket also symbolises taste, both in the sense of aesthetic appreciation and in the sense of being able to judge what is in legitimate taste, a taste that is defined and shared by a certain social class, in this case the educated middle class that the Hales represent. Mr Thornton's polished manners are also an indication of a certain kind of taste which is more fully expressed by the baskets of fruit given to Mrs Hale. The gifts express good taste for they conform to the aesthetic and consumption ideals of the Hales. Lupton contends that taste is "a means of distinction, a way of subtly identifying and separating 'refined' individuals from the lower, 'vulgar' classes."[331] The baskets of fruit and the manner in which they are given gradually distinguish Mr Thornton from the other members of the industrial middle class making him more refined and recommends him to Mrs Hale to whom he has earlier been the "tradesman" that she is forced to entertain (NS 76).

[330] James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (London: John Murray, 1979) 134.
[331] Lupton, 95.

Conclusions

In the novel, the hungry working-class characters are presented as starving individuals worthy of sympathy and victims of circumstances rather than victims of their own failing morals; they are rational agents consciously planning to use hunger and voluntary starvation as a means of control and a weapon in their conflict with the mill-owners. The discourse of hunger in the novel also reveals differences within the working class regarding economic power, and hungerstriking in the novel is also a gesture of solidarity with the more deprived mill workers. Although hunger and animality are linked in *North and South*, the representations of the hungry poor as near animals are fewer; yet hunger is seen as a threat which could indirectly but potentially lead to a working-class uprising.

The representations of middle-class food consumption reveal differences within the class; the difference between the industrial middle class, the Thorntons, and the traditional middle class, the Hales, is also the difference between possessing economic capital or cultural capital. These capitals are used in social performance to establish and control class identities and when criticising the lavishness of the Thorntons' dinner table Margaret Hale is implicitly controlling the class body. More explicit control is nevertheless exercised by the middle-class characters over working-class consumption. When Margaret tries to prevent the working-class Nicholas Higgins from drinking, she is explicitly controlling his consumption of alcohol, and the working-class body as a whole. Nicholas Higgins's drinking, which is presented as an occasional lapse caused by mental and physical distress rather than a vice with moral and social consequences, brings out the role of women, first of his daughter Bessy and then of Margaret Hale, as the controlling power. Similarly, when the new vicar of the Hales' former home

Helstone and his wife advise the working-class parishioners on how and what to eat and drink they are controlling their consumption. Further, although Mr Thornton's scheme of collective food consumption is presented as partly an act of goodwill and partly an effort to increase work efficiency, it is nevertheless another explicit form of controlling working-class food consumption and another means to construct and reconstruct the class body.

In the narrative, fruits are used as sexual and romantic metaphor; they symbolise Margaret's relationships with both Henry Lennox and Mr Thornton. The pears in the Helstone garden symbolise not only Henry Lennox's romantic and sexual interest in Margaret but also her fall from innocence with the realisation that she is ripe to be consumed. On the other hand, the pear that Mr Hale so deliberately peels and consumes in the garden represents not only his last moments of Edenic idyll but also that of his wife's and daughter's and their last moments of innocence before the fall which follows. The baskets of fruit that Mr Thornton gives as gifts not only invite an allegorical reading of the evolving relationship between Margaret and Thornton but are also expressions of his feelings for her; they eventually transform him from a conventional representative of economic capital and bad taste into a possessor of what is considered good, or even legitimate, taste and thus a suitable mate for Margaret, the epitome of cultural capital. As such, the baskets of fruit are used by Mr Thornton to control and successfully redefine social and cultural boundaries. A more prosaic gift of food is given in *Sylvia's Lovers* where a basket of sausages offered as a gift is used as an expression of compassion and as a definition of a social community. At the same time, it also articulates the female protagonist's dormant romantic feelings towards the recipient.

5. *Sylvia's Lovers*

Consumption and Community: "Eaking out cream"

In *North and South* the baskets of fruit, neatly arranged and decorated, articulate Mr Thornton's feelings towards Margaret but also his taste. In *Sylvia's Lovers* a basket of sausages given to Charlie Kinraid, a young sailor wounded in a conflict with the press-gang and now recuperating at the house of the Robsons' neighbours, the Corneys, is an expression of sympathy but also of communal spirit; it is part of the creating and enforcing of social relationships within the Monkshaven community. It is Sylvia Robson's mother who suggests the gift of sausages: "I wonder if yon poor sick chap at Moss Brow would fancy some o' my sausages. They're something to crack on, for they are made fra' an old Cumberland receipt, as is not known i' Yorkshire yet" (SL 82). While reinforcing communality the gift also differentiates Bell Robson as "a Cumberland woman" (SL 37-8) who is proud not only of her own skills in sausage making but also of her origins. Her adherence to a recipe which reflects her geographical roots and her taste in food such as her preference for "clap-bread … over the leavened and partly sour kind used in Yorkshire" (SL 38) are indications of her reluctance to incorporate the foodways of her 'new' community and consequently to be incorporated by it. The choices she makes when it comes to food thus define her geographical and cultural identity and emphasise her position as an outsider in the Monkshaven community.

The transformation of the sausages from edible commodities kept in the pantry into a gift is manifest in the basket which is not only a means of transporting the sausages from one place to another but also a kind of wrapping which labels the

sausages as gift. The physical label nevertheless remains very weak and the verbal label non-existent: although Mrs Corney expresses her thanks for the sausages, the word 'gift' never occurs in the characters' speech in connection with them. Sylvia attempts to emphasise the physical label of the sausages by suggesting that the basket should be lined with a damask napkin because "it would set off t' sausages" (SL 83). She is nevertheless checked by her mother who sees no point in using "[t]he best napkins" (SL 82) for a basket of sausages: "'A good clean homespun cloth will serve them better,' said Bell, wondering in her own mind what was come over the girl, to be thinking of setting off sausages that were to be eaten, not to be looked at like a picture-book" (SL 83). Mrs Robson's utilitarian approach to the sausages is an expression of her inability to understand the enhancement of their aesthetic value; she sees the sausages first and foremost as edible commodities the function of which is to nourish the body. If the working classes value function more than form, as Bourdieu maintains, then they would appreciate food for its nutritional value rather than its appearance and Mrs Robson's dismissal of the best damask napkins for the sausages would express her working-class appreciation of the sausages' value as food rather than their aesthetic value. On the other hand, Sylvia's concern for the appearance of the gift of sausages contradicts Bourdieu's contention for she further seeks to enhance the appearance of the sausages in the basket:

> [Mrs Robson] might have wondered still more, if she had seen Sylvia steal round to the little flower border … and gather the two or three Michaelmas daisies, and the one bud of the China rose, that … had escaped the frost; and then, when her mother was not looking, softly open the cloth inside of the little basket that contained the sausages and a fresh egg or two, and lay her autumn blossoms in one of the folds of the towel. (SL 83)

The motivation behind Sylvia's efforts is less collective than her mother's for it can be argued that she operates on a more personal level. Sylvia's wish to appear at her best in the eyes of Charlie Kinraid is made clear from the way her thoughts are represented whenever these two characters come into contact and the importance of the appearance of the gift of sausages is parallel to the importance of her own appearances. If a gift imposes an identity on both the giver and the recipient, whether realistic or imagined, then the decorating of the basket of sausages is also a reflection of Sylvia's image of Charlie Kinraid not only as a convalescent but also as a romantic hero and her still unconscious fascination with him in the romantic sense.

Gifts of food can thus be used to create and recreate a sense of community but they are also an expression of "love or trust… [or] an act of kindness or altruism".[332] Later in the novel, widow Dobson feeding Philip Hepburn who lodges with her incognito and who calls himself "a sinner—one o' t' devil's children" (SL 433) is an expression of trust but also of solidarity and hospitality. Her willingness to share her dining table and her meals with him even when this means less, or poorer, food for herself: "a've made mysel' some stirabout for my supper; and if yo'd like t' share an' share about wi' me, it's but puttin' a sup more watter to 't, and God's blessing 'll be on 't, just as same as if 't were meal" (SL 433) is an altruistic act of hospitality which comes close to something Sahlins calls "disinterested concern"[333] for the recipient for the narrative does not disclose any other motives for her actions other than her being "soft-hearted" (SL 431). When she explains that the reason she keeps her lodger, who can barely pay for his upkeep, is the fact that she can provide more for him with the money he pays because "it's few as can mak' victual go farther nor [her]" (SL 436), the narrator points out how her explanation could serve "a more calculating head" (SL 436)

[332] Lupton, 47.
[333] Sahlins, 31.

as an excuse to get rid of her lodger rather than keep him. Providing food for the poor can hide a superstitious dread of occupying the recipient's place and a wish to receive help in turn; thus widow Dobson's hospitality can be seen as following Bell Robson's "superstition which had prevented her from ever sending the hungry empty away, for fear lest she herself should come to need bread" (SL 437).

By sharing her food with her lodger, the widow Dobson participates in a wider network of food sharing in the novel, for meals offered to guests are not only an enunciation of the participants' social and economic position and power but they also serve as means of creating and sustaining social community and social alliances. For the Foster brothers, the shopkeepers of Monkshaven who are rumoured to be so rich "that they only kept on shop for their amusement" (SL 27), sharing food is a means of maintaining social and business contacts. In the process of selling their shop to their employees, Philip Hepburn and William Coulson, the Foster brothers invite the young men to a supper. The reception of the guests, "in spite of the friendly kindness" (SL 156) of the brothers, reflects the business aspect of the meal; it is characterised by a certain kind of formality which, "however admirable, was not calculated to promote ease" (156). The meal serves as a preliminary to a discussion on formal business matters, it is "an unusual honour" (SL 155) rather than pleasure and it simultaneously separates and unites the eaters for the guests are both employees and prospective successors at the same time.

When providing their guests with food the Foster brothers engage in creating and sustaining social alliances in a fairly formal manner. When inviting Philip Hepburn and his new wife Sylvia to a supper after they have married, the Foster brothers offer a meal which is more a social ceremony "to do her [Sylvia] honour" (SL 317) than an occasion of food consumption; it is a ritual whereby Sylvia's identity as Mrs Hepburn,

the shopkeeper's wife, is constructed and a new social alliance is formed. Although the novel does not present "fully-fledged middle-class characters" as Marion Shaw puts it,[334] the Foster brothers, with their "respectable bourgeois occupations"[335] of shopkeeping and banking, and Philip, whose professional advancement also means a social one, are representatives of the new commercial middle class. For Sylvia, whose father has been a whaler and later a tenant farmer, the marriage to Philip signifies a change not only in daily life but also in social position. She nevertheless feels stifled by the demands of her new life, "with all its respectability and comfort" (SL 319), missing her former freedom and even her daily farm chores. Unlike Mrs Kirkpatrick in *Wives and Daughters* who desires to be the 'lady' and sit in the parlour doing nothing, Sylvia wants "to escape from the comfortable imprisonment of her 'parlour'" (SL 318) to the seashore, the scenery of her former life. She is reluctant to play the role of the Veblenesque vicarious consumer whose leisure indicates the economic success and status of the husband, and the respectability of the household. In fact, it is mostly for Sylvia's sake, to be able to place "his idol in a befitting shrine" (SL 311) that Philip "with his moderate wants" (SL 311) wants to prosper, but to his disappointment Sylvia does not embrace her new role with the vigour Philip would like her to do.

The narrator points out Sylvia's anxiety about the supper, for she had been to "merry country parties like the Corneys', and to bright haymaking romps in the open air; but never to a set stately party at a friend's house" (SL 317) and consequently she needs to be schooled by Philip in the ways of a more formal party as well as in her own role as "bride and most honoured guest" (SL 317). His schooling manages to make her even more nervous and frightened about the "grandeur and importance of the occasion,

[334] Marion Shaw, "Elizabeth Gaskell, Tennyson and the Fatal Return: *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Enoch Arden*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 9 (1995) 49.
[335] J. R. Watson, "Elizabeth Gaskell: Heroes and Heroines, and *Sylvia's Lovers*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 18 (2004) 83.

and the necessity of remembering certain set rules, and making certain set speeches and attending to them when the right time came" (SL 317). The narrative does not offer description of the food offered or references to eating, or any other details of the party, but reduces the supper into a Bourdieuan social ceremony which Sylvia finds intimidating and tedious: she "sate, pale and weary-looking, on the very edge of her chair; she uttered the formal words which Philip had told her were appropriate to the occasion, and she heartily wished herself safe at home and in bed" (SL 317-8).

The farmer Corney's New Year's party, on the other hand, is characterised not only by direct references to eating and the large amount of food available but also by the informality in the way the guests and hosts behave and the food is consumed; it aims at strengthening and maintaining social alliances at the communal level in a different way. The "substantial supper" at the party is served "in the large old flagged parlour, which served as best bed-room as well" (SL 127); the word 'substantial' already emphasising the quantity of food on which Bessy, one of the family's daughters, comments to her married sister now living in Newcastle: "Theere, Molly! … Yo' niver seed more vittle brought together i' Newcassel, I'll be bound; there'll be above half a hundred-weight o' butcher's meat, besides pies and custards. I've eaten no dinner these two days for thinking on 't" (SL 129). Bessy's pride in the amount of food available and the implication that she has been fasting for two days in anticipation of a feast expresses not only the Bourdieuan working-class preference for quantity but also hunger for food, an expression deemed improper for the female sex in the nineteenth century. Bessy's declaration of hunger and appetite for the food abounding on the table is a declaration of her class status for appetite and hunger were both class- and gender-bound so that what was considered improper for "a lady" was acceptable to a working-class woman.[336]

[336] Attar, "Keeping Up Appearances," 139.

Tempting as it would be to validate Bourdieu's argument about the lack of sequencing in presenting and consuming food being typical of the working class,[337] contending that the Corneys' supper table, on which all the food is laid simultaneously regardless of courses, reflects and sustains this idea, making the supper a proof of the Corneys' working-class status, it would nevertheless be only partially viable. Although the supper manifests, in addition to the family's relative economic power, a certain kind of freedom of form shown in the lack of order in the sitting arrangement as well as the serving of the food, it is also a testimony of varying customs and trends in food consumption. The Corneys' piled-up table reflects the importance of supper as an evening entertainment before fashion embraced late dinners and reflects the food consumption patterns appropriate to the novel's social and historical context for a supper table did not discriminate between courses but all dishes, savoury and sweet, were laid at the table simultaneously and were eaten according to the eaters' fancy.[338]

Bessy Corney's comment on how their supper table would put to shame any table in Newcastle when it comes to the amount of food also implies reproof for her sister Molly's urban pretensions. Molly Brunton, who has married a shop-keeper and moved to Newcastle, questions the family's skill and taste in matters of food both of which she considers old-fashioned: "[S]tick a bit o' holly i' yon pig's mouth, that's the way we do things i' Newcassel; but folks is so behindhand in Monkshaven. It's a fine thing to live in a large town" (SL 128). Our attitude to food is often connected with cultural as well as economic factors, "that is, knowing what is considered to be fine and interesting food and having the money to pay for it."[339] Food is susceptible to changes in fashion and Molly Brunton's statement implies if not a superior financial position at

[337] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 195.
[338] C. Anne Wilson, "Supper: The Ultimate Meal," *Eating with the Victorians*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004) 143-4.
[339] Lupton, 146-7.

least cultural knowledge of trends in food and especially in food presentation acquired in the town. Her critical comment: "[s]weet butter! Now that's my mother's old-fashioned way; as if folks must eat sweet butter now-a-days, because her mother did!" (SL 129) or her ignoring her father's wish to have "pickled walnuts stuck about t' round o' beef" (128) reveal not only a change in food fashions but also a generational gap widened by Molly Brunton's new urban lifestyle. When the table is finally set and all the food displayed, Molly reflects on its appearance: "'It's well enough in a country kind o' way,' said Molly, with the faint approbation of condescension. 'But if I'd thought on, I'd ha' brought 'em down a beast or two done i' sponge-cake, wi' currants for his eyes to give t' table an air." (SL 130). Table decorating became more and more elaborate in the nineteenth century, but already around mid-nineteenth century it usually consisted of inedible objects: ornaments, flowers, and candles instead of the edible decorations and centrepieces in vogue in the eighteenth century.[340] Molly's idea of having animal-shaped edible decorations for the table is presented as a trendy urban manner which emphasises her pretensions to fashionable living yet at the time of the writing of the novel it would have already had a quaint old-fashioned and perhaps even nostalgic feel to it. Molly's rejection of the foodways of the community in which she grew up also manifests a rejection of the community itself and her shifted allegiances. Her expectations and ideas of food consumption reflect the foodways of the community she now lives in and by disparaging the conventions of Monkshaven in this respect she expresses solidarity with the conventions of Newcastle, the foodways of which she has incorporated and the food system into which she has been incorporated; the change of her food consumption habits is also a change in the way she defines herself. Although

[340] Attar, 134.

still part of the Corney family, she has acquired a new identity of which her foodways are an indication.

When the supper is finally served, after tea and parlour games, the guests have to take two shifts to eat for the space is limited. The freedom of form is shown in the way the shift of the supper eaters changes: the guests that have been waiting for their turn are not formally invited in but take the initiative themselves. They are led by Bessy Corner "who opened the door to see if the hungry ones outside might not come in for their share of entertainment; and in they rushed, bright and riotous, scarcely giving the first party time to rise from their seats ere they took their places" (SL 140). The entrance of the guests lacks order and control and at the same time it is a manifestation of a free expression of hunger. The party as a whole seems to be a celebration where the consumption of food, "the busy heads and over-reaching arms"(SL 140) of the supper-eaters, or the guests' behaviour in general are not restricted by certain rules or regulations and this freedom from form separates the party from the Bourdieuan middle-class ideals. The fact that the hosts are "urging people to eat, heaping their plates over their shoulders with unexpected good things" (SL 140) accentuates the presence and the central role of food in the scene and draws attention to the actual act of consuming food, leaving social ceremony aside. Moreover, the guests are described as being "stuffed to repletion" (SL 140) which emphasises the ultimate function of food as something meant to fill the stomach more than please the eye.

At the supper, the informal and disorderly entrance of the second set of supper-eaters is followed by the utmost informality and breaking of rules when it comes to using crockery, for some of the guests have to eat from dirty plates already used by other guests:

> There was no time for changing or washing plates; but then, as Mrs Corney laughingly observed,—
> 'We're a' on us friends, and some on us mayhap sweethearts; so no need to be particular about plates. Them as gets clean ones is lucky; and them as doesn't, and cannot put up wi' plates that has been used, mun go without.' (SL 140)

Mary Douglas points out that "[o]ur idea of dirt is compounded of two things, care for hygiene and respect for conventions"[341] and in the Corneys' party both hygiene and conventions are compromised. Douglas further points out that the conventions about "dirt-avoidance" are more flexible and "can be set aside for the sake of a friendship".[342] The need to draw attention to the use of dirty plates implies awareness of the conventions of food consumption but also willingness to break the rules if necessary. The breaking of the rules of convention emphasises not only the informality of the party and the food consumption, and the general conviviality of the gathering, but also the idea of community, the members of which are linked by relationships of different degrees. The assumption that the guests might not object to eating from plates used by other guests enforces the idea of a community; it is a sign of inclusion and friendship.

Although the party seeks to enforce the sense of community and communal spirit with its parlour games and its informal friendliness, and with the freedom from form which is here extended to the seating or rather to the lack of any strict order in the way the guests are sitting around the table, "squeezing and cramming, and sitting together on chairs, which was not at all out of etiquette at Monkshaven" (SL 139), subtle differentiations are made concerning the guests and the serving of food. The order in which the guests are invited to eat articulates a hierarchy apparently based on

[341] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2001) 7.
[342] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 8. For Bourdieu, the informal use of plates and cutlery, sharing them or using the same ones for several dishes, is a working-class habit. He maintains that the utensils can be used as a symbol of the hosts' relationship with the guests and a way to differentiate between them: an unwelcome guest, for example, may be isolated by being served every dish from a clean plate and thus being treated as a stranger instead of a friend (*Distinction*, 195).

age, although Philip Hepburn is also among the first ones to be asked in: "Mrs Corney … bade him go in to supper along with some of the elder ones, who were not playing; for the parlour was not large enough to hold all at once" (SL 139). Singling Philip out from the other young people seems to indicate his relatively high place in the hierarchy of the guests, and thus in the community, but it is also an indication that his reluctance to participate in the general merry-making, or his "mopin'" (SL 131), distinguishes him from the other young people. His occupation and the social position it implies further distinguishes him from the other young men: "Most of these were young farmers, with whom Philip had nothing in common" (SL 132). As Rance notes, Philip is "[e]conomically and emotionally" more sophisticated than the ordinary Monkshaven people,[343] a fact which contributes to his role as an onlooker. Like Sylvia's mother, his aunt, he too has a pedigree for he is "a Preston, which were a family o' standin' and means i' those parts [Cumberland] aforetime" (SL 124).[344]

Moreover, although the guests sitting at the table at the first round have been distinguished as a group from the other guests, they seem to be sitting round the table in a hierarchical order. The description of the hosts serving drinks, "filling the glasses at the upper end of the table, and the mugs which supplied the deficiency of glasses at the lower" (SL 140), describes two ways of expressing hierarchy among the guests. In the medieval times the social worth of the guests attending a meal was manifest in the seating order: the guests of distinction were placed 'above the salt', that is, on the raised table where the salt cellar stood, and the lower orders 'below the salt', that is, on the lower tables. Later, when guests began to form a socially more homogeneous group, and servants and other representatives of the lower classes did not share their meals

[343] Rance, 147.
[344] Sylvia's father expresses the difference between himself and his daughter and his wife and Philip by using a food analogy: "Thee an' me, lass, is Robson—oat-cake folk, while they's pie-crust" (SL 124).

with higher classes, the seating arrangement became less rigorous. However, the idea of the upper and the lower ends of a table remained and the narrative uses it to present subtle gradations of status among the guests.[345] Similarly, distinguishing between glasses and mugs and thus between more and less expensive drinking vessels expresses recognition of hierarchy: glasses for the upper end, mugs for the lower. John Peck notes that under the seemingly united front and a "shared national identity" which finds its expression in the shared hatred of the French, Monkshaven is a divided society.[346] The division is manifest also in the representations of food consumption which reveal that the Monkshaven society is not a homogeneous entity but one within which hierarchies are constructed and articulated.

The subtle distinctions made between the guests at the supper table are also evident in the process of serving tea. Both Lincoln and Anderson emphasise how group hierarchies are constructed and communicated through food practices; in addition to the order of service, for example, food and drink themselves can be used as signs of differentiation for the amount and/or quality of everyone's share gives an indication of the guest's position within the group in question.[347] Although Mrs Corney receives offers of help from the unmarried female guests who are willing to help "in eager desire to show their capability" (SL 132) and thus demonstrate their household skills in a social situation, she is reluctant to accept the help for fear that it would disturb her system of serving and distributing tea: "there were certain little contrivances for eking out cream, and adjusting the strength of the cups of tea to the worldly position of the intended drinkers, which she did not like every one to see" (SL 132). Tea was expensive

[345] This idea is also used in Gaskell's "Cousin Phillis" where the Holman family share their meal but not their table with their servants: the family sits in the dining room and the servants in the kitchen and the door between these two spaces is kept open when there are no guests. There is thus a physical separation between the high table and the low table, and although the servants are an integral part of the household the seating arrangement is a metaphor for the inner hierarchy.
[346] John Peck, *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and Sea in British and American Novels, 1719-1917* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 135.
[347] Lincoln, 87-8; Anderson, 126.

because heavily taxed; it was initially a luxury item and often "a Sunday treat" (SL 83) which would mark a special occasion, a holiday or a visit: "for any visitor who could stay, neither cream nor finest wheaten flour was wanting for 'turf cakes' and 'singing hinnies' with which it is the delight of the northern housewives to regale the honoured guest, as he sips their high-priced tea, sweetened with dainty sugar" (SL 38).[348] According to Sarah Freeman, the "correct way to drink tea was with cream instead of milk and very small lumps of sugar", correct meaning the middle- and upper-class way.[349] The fact that Mrs Corney serves her tea with cream and Mrs Robson with "dainty", that is, with small and delicate pieces of sugar, shows adherence to correct form but also the relative prosperity of both of the families considering the fact that in the early nineteenth century the poor working classes would have found it difficult to afford either milk, not to mention cream, or sugar with their tea.[350] When Mrs Corney is "eking out cream" (SL 132) she is controlling the amount of cream each cup of tea contains, cream being not only the proper accompaniment to tea but also somewhat a luxury, and thus discriminating between the guests. The guests higher up in the community's hierarchy will be served more cream and stronger tea. Although the impression the party and the sharing of food gives, and is perhaps meant to give, is that of forging unity and maintaining community, the social alliances it constructs and enforces are to be found on the level of individuals. Singling out guests articulates hierarchy within the community and is not necessarily conducive to communal spirit; thus Mrs Corney's wish to keep her manoeuvrings secret can be seen as an attempt not to attenuate the spirit yet at the same time it is an expression of the illusory nature of the coherence of the social group.

[348] Turf cakes and singing hinnies are both kind of currant cakes.
[349] Freeman, 87.
[350] Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures*, 57.

Drink and Masculinity: "Each man should have 'enough'"

To humour his wife who is recovering from illness, Daniel Robson condescendingly agrees to drink tea instead of "spirits and water" (SL 123) with her: "he contented himself with sharing her tea, though he kept abusing the beverage as 'washing the heart out of a man' and attributing all the degeneracy of the world, growing up about him in his old age, to the drinking of such slop" (SL 123). The fact that the expensive tea leaves could be brewed several times, every brew producing weaker tea and the fact that tea was often adulterated and cosmetically enhanced by using colourings would in some cases really make tea resemble slop. In *Cottage Economy*, William Cobbett, like Daniel Robson, associates tea with unmanliness but also with bad health: he considers "tea drinking as a destroyer of health, an enfeebler of the frame, an engenderer of effeminacy and laziness".[351] Still in the late eighteenth century, heavy drinking was often accepted masculine behaviour and "beer and spirits had been traditionally associated with health, muscular energy and virility,"[352] and in Daniel Robson's mind tea is symbolically slop as opposed to alcohol which in the sea-faring and farming community of Monkshaven constructs masculinity and connotes masculine sociability. Gaskell had already noted the role of spirits as part of the creation of masculine community in a short story called "The Doom of the Griffiths" (1858), set in a remote and wild part of Wales, in which a male character is considered "peculiar" because he does not care for alcohol: "Robert Griffiths was habitually sober – a thing so rare in Llyn, that he was almost shunned as a churlish, unsociable being, and passed much of his time in solitude" (DG 106). Drinking is such a part of social life that not to drink is seen as an exception, a refusal to be part of the community.

[351] Cobbett, *Cottage Economy*, 18.
[352] Davidoff and Hall, 400.

In *Sylvia's Lovers*, drinking is a way to create a 'party atmosphere' especially for the young men at the Corneys' New Year's party who during the first party games "looked shamefaced, and afraid of each other's ridicule" (SL 134-5) until a jug of beer appears. The jug is in the shape of a man and it is the shape that acts as an excuse for the male guests to approach the jug and its contents. The narrative takes a comic turn when it describes this approach and the way the male guests behave:

> Before long one of the lads was seized with a fit of admiration for Toby—the name of the old gentleman who contained liquor—and went up to the tray for a closer inspection. He was speedily followed by other amateurs of curious earthenware; and by-and-by Mr Brunton … thought it fit to carry out Toby to be replenished; and a faster spirit of enjoyment and mirth began to reign in the room (SL 135).

The jug comes with contradictory instructions attached to it: Mr Brunton "had been charged by his mother-in-law with the due supplying of liquor—by his father-in-law that every man should have his fill, and by his wife and her sisters that no one should have too much, at any rate at the beginning of the evening" (SL 135). Mrs Corney seems to be concerned to observe the requirements of hospitality and what is proper; Mr Corney's idea of serving the guests as much beer as they want and can consume is opposed to her daughters' wish to control the intake of alcohol and the general atmosphere of the party. The narrator points out that Mr Corney's principle of alcohol consumption on social occasions derives from his concept of hospitality: Mr Corney, "after the notions of hospitality prevalent at that time in higher circles, had stipulated that each man should have 'enough' before he left the house; enough meaning in Monkshaven parlance the liberty of getting drunk, if they thought fit to do it" (SL 135). In the eighteenth century, drinking and even intemperance were part of social life, regardless of class, and excessive drinking part of entertaining; in the nineteenth

century, attitudes changed and heavy drinking and drunkenness came to be regarded as problematic.[353] There is thus a generational gap between the characters' ideas about heavy drinking; the father's insistence on the male guests' right to drink to excess reflects the concept of accepted social behaviour at the time the novel is set and the daughters' attempt to control the consumption of alcohol is more in accordance with the Victorian notions about drinking and desired male behaviour 'in higher circles'.

Nelly Corney's observation that "if their visitors had too much to drink at that early part of the evening 'it would spoil t' fun'" (SL 135) is an expression of her wish to control the amount and strength of the alcohol served, indicating the role accorded to female characters in the novel when it comes to consuming alcohol. Drinking is seen as a part of working-class male life while it is the role of the female characters to control and moderate the drinking of men: "If Sylvia went with her father, he never drank to excess; and that was a good gain to health at any rate (drinking was hardly a sin against morals in those days, and in that place); so, occasionally, she was allowed to accompany him to Monkshaven as a check upon his folly" (SL 116). In the novel, drinking, especially publicly, is not proper behaviour for female characters and even visiting a pub is considered demeaning and morally suspect. When Sylvia's father takes her to a pub with him during a statute fair, "a yearly festival for the lower classes of Yorkshire servants" (SL 118), the fact of her presence is noted and passed on to Philip Hepburn who notes to Sylvia's mother that the father "should na' take a girl like her to a public… such a one as our Sylvie ought not to be cheapened wi' t' rest" (SL 117). The mere presence of a young girl like Sylvia in a pub "among all t' flustered maids and men, rough and red wi' weather and drink" (SL 117) degrades her. It associates her with lower class servants and with those less respectable women who drink publicly and she

[353] Shiman, 1-2.

is in danger of becoming less respectable by association. It is nevertheless not only her presence and the fact that she is publicly spoken of but also the fact that in an environment where normal codes of behaviour do not rule she is exposed to both the visual and verbal attention of men who would not normally dare to approach her.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a change in the attitudes had rendered public drinking a dubious activity and according to Harrison, "the village inn, where all classes drank together, had become a nostalgic memory".[354] In *Sylvia's Lovers*, drinking is nostalgically represented as part of the life in the past where "every bargain and agreement was ratified by drink" (SL 243) and not as a working-class vice caused by extreme poverty and leading to moral degeneration. The narrator draws attention to the fact that in Monkshaven heavy drinking or being drunk does not stigmatise the characters and drinking is not usually a marker of social downfall or being an outcast, or indeed a sin, as the narrator notes. Especially heavy drinking is seen as something that happens at intervals or on special occasions and does not have much effect on the drinkers' social life or their life at home: some men "went off once or twice a year, or even oftener, on drinking bouts of two or three days' duration, returning pale, sodden, and somewhat shame-faced, when all their money was gone; and, after the conjugal reception was well over, settling down into hard-working and decently sober men until the temptation again got power over them" (SL 243). Drinking is not seen as sin per se but a temptation that possibly leads to sin. The male characters in the novel who drink in "bouts" are nevertheless also described as "hard-working" citizens and the possible consequences of their drinking are not discussed nor is the outcome of their drinking usually presented as a disaster.

[354] Harrison, 46.

One exception is Daniel Robson, whose increased drinking the narrator offers as a possible "physiological explanation" (SL 233) for his crucial role as an instigator of the attack on the press-gang which turns into a riot and a violation of the Riot Act, leading to his imprisonment and execution.[355] In his wish to hear about the movements of the press-gang he more frequently visits the local pub and consequently consumes more alcohol and the narrator suggests that "the amount of drink thus consumed weakened Robson's power over his mind, and caused the concentration of thought on one subject" (SL 233), that is, on his animosity towards the press-gang. Similar to John Barton in *Mary Barton*, whose use of opium renders him fixated on the wrong-doings of the millowners and which leads to him becoming a murderer, Daniel Robson's actions are seen as the consequence of a "supernatural kind of possession" (SL 233) caused by the use of alcohol. Although the novel exploits the press-gang incidents mainly as plot device, Daniel Robson's death and his accusation of Philip Hepburn (whose reception of the news of the fatal riot are more lukewarm than Daniel would have wished for) of being unfeeling are reminders of the social consequences of impressment: "Wives an' little 'uns may go to t' workhouse or clem for aught he [Philip] cares" (SL 249). The work of press-gangs would indeed often result in the wives and children of an impressed man being left in a financially precarious situation, as Nicholas Rogers demonstrates in his study of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century press-gang operations and the extent of opposition to them. He notes that families left behind would often face a situation where they could not afford to pay for food or for lodgings and would have been forced to recourse to begging, or stealing, to avoid starvation.[356]

[355] The Riot Act of 1714 stated that the local authorities had the right to declare any group of twelve or more people an unlawful assembly if they did not disperse in an hour after being ordered to do so and after being read the riot act. The Act was repealed in 1967.
[356] Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and Its Opponents in Georgian Britain* (London: Continuum, 2007) 1-3.

Ironically, Daniel Robson's opposition to the actions of the press-gang leads into a situation in which his own family's livelihood is jeopardised.

Another casualty of alcohol abuse is Philip Hepburn who enlists in the navy while drunk. After Charlie Kinraid returns to reclaim Sylvia and Philip's betrayal is revealed, she renounces Philip and their marriage and Philip decides to leave Monkshaven and wanders on until he ends up in a public house, exhausted and starving, where he is offered food and drink by a recruiting sergeant. His unaccustomed consumption of alcohol, "beer, into which a noggin of gin had been put" (SL 354), in addition to his desperate frame of mind has an effect on Philip: "A burning thirst … took possession of Philip, and he drunk freely, scarcely recognizing what he drank. It took effect on one so habitually sober; and he was soon in that state when the imagination works wildly and freely" (SL 355). The sight of the recruiting sergeant in his uniform and the pictures he paints of a brilliant career as a marine for "a man of education" (SL 355) make the drunken Philip dream of a future when he would return to Monkshaven "handsome and glorious, to win back the love that had never been his" (SL 356). In other words, he dreams of becoming somebody else, somebody like Charlie Kinraid who has won the love he has been coveting all his adult life. The narrator notes how Philip is incapable of thinking clearly because of being inebriated and consequently, lured by the recruiting sergeant's promises and by his own visions, he is recruited: "At length, almost, as it would seem, by some sleight of hand, he found the fatal shilling in his palm" (SL 355). By receiving and accepting the King's shilling, Philip is bound to service; by taking advantage of Philip's mental and physical state, the recruiting sergeant tricks Philip into service in the manner often used in the recruiting process: "plying the needy or gullible with drink and enticing them to take the king's

shilling" as Nicholas Rogers puts it.[357] Although realising in the morning that he has been tricked into service and that his dreams of a victorious return home to claim Sylvia's love are illusory, he nevertheless decides to continue the process, finding in it a way to start a new life or end the present one. Drinking thus leads Philip into a situation he cannot control; alcohol affects his mind and he loses his ability to think clearly.

Philip's usual sobriety defines his identity in the Monkshaven community; already his occupation as a shop assistant emphasises his exclusion from the conventional masculine culture of the farmers and the whalers for in Daniel Robson's view it somehow robs him of his masculinity: "thou'rt little better nor a woman, for sure, bein' mainly acquaint wi' ribbons" (SL 192). Drinking or drinking moderately works as a tool of differentiation in the novel and by shunning alcohol, "disliking drinking habits … by constitution" (SL 46), Philip Hepburn is distinguished from the likes of Daniel Robson. In fact, drinking is such a part in constructing masculinity among the social circles of the Robson family that Philip is the only man Sylvia Robson knows who does not have the habit of drinking to the extent that his "ideas become confused" (SL 45). Philip's aversion to drinking might be a reflection of his allegiance to the Quakers, among whom he has been raised although not one himself, who accepted drinking in moderation, especially of wine and beer, but opposed any excess consumption of alcohol.[358] Yet his temperance in matters of drinking also reflects his class position as a member of the nascent commercial middle class, first as a shop assistant and then a partner in a thriving shop; it is a way to be distinguished but also to distinguish himself from the other, less moderate, young men of Monkshaven, such as Ned Simpson, the butcher, who is a bit of a womaniser and "comely enough" but "with

[357] Nicholas Rogers, 4.
[358] Shiman, 57. Andrew Sanders notes that in the course of the narrative Philip's religious allegiances change and he abandons Quakerism in favour of Anglicanism, a change Sanders sees linked with Philip's class ambitions and his "aspiration to proper Anglican respectability" (Andrew Sanders, "Varieties of Religious Experience in *Sylvia's Lovers*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 6 (1992) 17).

a depth of colour in his face that betokened the coming on of the habits of the sot" (SL 119).

In a narrative in which drinking is aligned with masculinity, Philip's avoidance of alcohol serves as a feminising factor. Serving the tea and the performance of the tea-time rituals were female occupations and the fact that it is Philip instead of his servant Phoebe who is preparing to serve tea to Sylvia and her mother when they visit Philip in his new home for the first time further implies a feminine trait in the character, a trait that is emphasised by the difference between him and Charlie Kinraid who being first a whaler and then a sailor in the navy, and finally a war hero, somehow epitomises conventional masculinity and whose masculinity is further confirmed by his ability to drink large amounts without getting muddled for he was "too well seasoned to care what amount of liquor he drank" (SL 135). The visit is not a happy one for Sylvia and her mother who have come to stay the night to be able to visit Sylvia's father who has been imprisoned and is waiting to be taken to York for trial. For Philip, the sadness is mixed with the happiness of having Sylvia under his roof and Philip is described as being "busy making tea, hospitable and awkward" (SL 272) when he has to interrupt his chores for a visit to the prison. He is reluctant to go, for the visit means not only an interruption of the making of the tea and "the first flush of his delightful rites of hospitality" (SL 272) but also an interruption of the time he is spending with Sylvia. Fromer contends that in the nineteenth century, the tea-table momentarily brought together the feminine and the masculine "in a shared moment of domesticity"[359] and for Philip, drinking tea together with Sylvia is a reflection of his wish to share his life and his home with her. In Philip's absence, when the tea is brewed, Sylvia suggests that she should serve the tea but her mother reminds her of the etiquette: "[i]t's not manners for

[359] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 98.

t' help oursel's" (SL 273). When Sylvia is finally pouring out a cup of tea for her mother Philip returns and "something in his look, some dumb expression of delight at her occupation, made her blush and hesitate for an instant" (SL 273). The pouring out of the tea forms an idyllic picture of femininity and domesticity, providing an illusion of the shared domesticity of which Philip dreams. If taking tea was understood as a moment which breaks down "the conventional barrier between the two sexes" as a nineteenth-century writer suggested,[360] then the tea-table scene seems to break down the barrier in two ways. Not only does it provide an opportunity for Philip to woo Sylvia in a rather unconventional way, by making her tea, but it also blurs the boundary between what was considered feminine and masculine in the nineteenth century. By performing the ceremonies of tea-table himself, instead of giving the employment to any of the females present in the house, Philip deliberately takes on the feminine role; in Deirdre d'Albertis words, he represents "feminized masculinity".[361] She notes that Philip, who at the end occupies a similar position to the economically dependent and oppressed women, after being tricked into naval service and then dependent on his pension for living, is portrayed "alternately as strangely maternal and improbably virile."[362] Yet he also straddles the conventional boundaries of gender in his "enduring love" (SL 150) for Sylvia and in his questioning of the disastrous results of being forced to relinquish loving her: "What if the thought of her was bound up with his life; and that once torn out by his own free will, the very roots of his heart must come also?" (SL 149). As Schor notes, the way Philip expresses his love is both extremely strong and

[360] Leitch Ritchie, "The Social Influence of Tea," *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal* 9 (213) (January 1848), 67, quoted in Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 98.
[361] d'Albertis, 129.
[362] d'Albertis, 131. Kestner also comments on the analogy between male and female oppression in *Sylvia's Lovers*, contending that the "political and social abuses" of the impressment correspond with "the victimized status of women" in the novel. Without any means to support herself, and her mother, after the death of her father, or after Philip's deceit is revealed, and lacking the legal or moral possibilities to divorce Philip, Sylvia, for example, is a victim of social and legal systems similar to the impressed sailors (194-5). See also Shaw, "*Sylvia's Lovers*, Then and Now," 43-4.

"conventionally feminine"; his love defines his identity the way love commonly defines a female identity in novels.[363] According to John Kucich, many of Gaskell's characters not only defy the conventions of gender boundaries but are often "flatly reversed."[364] He argues that lying is a feminine vice in nineteenth-century fiction, including that of Gaskell's; thus when the "effeminate"[365] Philip withholds the truth about Charlie Kinraid's impressment it is a realisation of the Gaskellian gender reversion.

Hunger: "Give me Sylvia, or else, I die"

The delight of sharing a moment of domestic idyll with Sylvia springs from Philip's hunger for her which shapes both his and her narratives. Although the Napoleonic Wars and especially Britain's war with France loom largely in the background of the narrative of *Sylvia's Lovers*, providing an important part in the formation and furthering of the plot, the novel comes only relatively late to some of the dire consequences of the war: hunger and famine. "[T]he hard famine" of "the spring of 1800" (SL 435) that pesters the nation and the Monkshaven community in the ending chapters of the novel is due to the war with France and the corn laws which together with a failed harvest "had brought the price of corn up to a famine rate" (SL 435). The famine in *Sylvia's Lovers* is thus presented as the result of two factors, namely protectionist domestic policies and foreign politics, neither of which are at the command of the people who mostly suffer from the results. Interestingly though, despite the historical fact of recurring food riots against exorbitant food prices at the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the novel never mentions such a possibility. Instead, it is the collective action instigated by the war with France and the impressment of the sailors

[363] Schor, 159.
[364] John Kucich, *The Power of Lies: Transgression in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) 124. For example, Osborne Hamley in *Wives and Daughters* is described as "almost effeminate in movement" (WD 167) and Mr Hale in *North and South* has "almost feminine" beauty (NS 78).
[365] Kucich, 127-8.

into naval service which forms an important thread in the narrative: the impressment of Charlie Kinraid provides Philip with the opportunity to get rid of a rival and in the aftermath of one of the riots Daniel Robson is arrested and sentenced to death.

The corn the "hungry creatures" are forced to buy is "unfit for food" (SL 435) even after the attempts to "cheat disease by mixing the damp, sweet, clammy flour with rice or potato meal" (SL 435). The plight of the hungry poor and the extent of the famine are expressed by the narrator who notes how instead of having to satisfy themselves with unsound corn, or to give up daily necessities, the "[r]ich families denied themselves pastry and all unnecessary and luxurious uses of wheat in any shape; the duty on hair-powder was increased; and all these palliatives were but as drops in the ocean of the great want of the people" (SL 435). Douglas and Isherwood note that luxuries are usually considered a group of commodities that are first given up in case of a sudden decrease in income[366] but here "luxurious uses of wheat" are given up not because of a drop in income but because of a drop in the amount of a wheat available on the market. Regulating the use of wheat implies an act of solidarity yet there is no indication that the rich would stop eating bread made out of wheat, or stop using wheat starch to enhance their looks, or that they would starve as the result of the high price of it. Nevertheless, both the individual and the collective intervention, in the form of a tax rise, seem to offer no solutions to the problem of famine; the use of the word 'palliative' implies criticism of, if not the rich, at least of a social system which inefficiently attempts to lessen the unpleasant symptoms of the famine but does not know how to cure the real causes.

Louise Tilly points out that failed harvests and war not only engender hunger but also endanger food entitlements[367] and in *Sylvia's Lovers* it is specifically the poorer

[366] Douglas and Isherwood, 69.
[367] Tilly, 139-40.

sections of the population whose entitlement to food is compromised; as one of the characters points out, "famine comes down like stones on t' head o' us poor folk" (SL 433). Both the scarcity of food and the increase in its price contribute to famine yet food is available and therefore it is more the question of who has enough economic power to purchase it. The difference in entitlements is illustrated by the contrast Hester Rose, "a kind of partner" (SL 377) in the shop-keeping business of William Coulson and Philip Hepburn, sees in the food consumption of the household she and her mother share with Sylvia Hepburn, and of those who are less affluent: she thought of those "starving … for insufficiency of means to buy the high-priced food. And then her heart burnt within her as she thought of the succulent, comfortable meals which Sylvia provided every day—nay, three times a day" (SL 442). The contrast between the poor and the wealthy at the end of the novel is epitomised by the contrast between Philip who lives incognito in poverty and represents those who "knew not the feeling of satisfied hunger" (SL 436) and characters like his wife or William Coulson whom Philip observes "going to his own home, his own wife, his comfortable, plentiful supper" (SL 435). Yet Philip's starvation is a choice rather than fate; by choosing not to claim his position and his property he has renounced his entitlement to food. His starvation is thus voluntary but he is not motivated by any political or social agenda but by a personal one; choosing literal hunger and starvation he is avoiding the more painful emotional starvation he fears he will face if he returns to his home and to his wife.

Hunger for food has its momentum only at the end of the narrative but Philip's hunger for his cousin Sylvia shapes the narrative from the beginning to the end, when the two hungers meet.[368] Otherwise a steady and conscientious young man with

[368] Although hunger for love, and passion, do shape the narrative to a great extent, I would not go as far as Andrew Sanders who in 1978 argued that passion is the only driving force in the novel and the characters' fate is not influenced by history, class, or economies but only by their "loving, hating and suffering selves" (Andrew Sanders, *The Victorian Historical Novel 1840-1880*, London: Macmillan, 1978, 199). I

religious leanings, "the pattern of all that early manhood should be" (SL 47) according to Sylvia's mother, Philip's character is marred by his obsessive love for Sylvia. Francesco Marroni contends that Philip's profession as a shopkeeper contributes to his ability "to dominate and 'administrate' his feelings" the same way he administrates the articles he sells.[369] It is true that he is able to control his feelings to a certain extent but I would nevertheless argue that it is finally his inability to do this that triggers the deceit concerning Charlie Kinraid's fate. The hunger for Sylvia dominates him rather than the other way round; it becomes the controlling power of his life and so uncontrollable that he is willing to sacrifice both his moral and religious principles to satisfy it. He recognises the potential danger of his strong feelings for Sylvia: "he had been brought up among the Quakers, and shared in their austere distrust of a self-seeking spirit; yet what else but self-seeking was his passionate prayer, 'Give me Sylvia, or else, I die?'" (SL 121). The major flaw in his character is perhaps not the fact that he is dishonest and deceitful as Tessa Brodetsky argues, [370] but that he is guilty of idolatry. The wish to one day see "his idol in a befitting shrine" (SL 311) is a trigger for his duplicity; he sees his 'sin' only at the end when he in a conciliatory death bed scene seeks both her and God's forgiveness.[371] By making Sylvia the primary object of his feelings, Philip has replaced religious 'yearning' by a carnal one and has thus relinquished the principles that are part of his upbringing. Or, as Carol Lansbury puts it, Philip's behaviour illustrates Gaskell's

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would, on the contrary, argue that history, class, and economics very much shape the plot and the characters' lives, in addition to passion.

[369] Francesco Marroni, "Elizabeth Gaskell's Tragic Vision: Historical Time and Timelessness in *Sylvia's Lovers*," *Elizabeth Gaskell, Victorian Culture, and the Art of Fiction: Original Essays for the Bicentenary*, ed. Sandro Jung, Gent: Academia Press, 2010) 169.

[370] Tessa Brodetsky, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986) 91. According to Brodetsky, all the three main characters in the novel "exhibit a *major* flaw in their personalities". She contends that Sylvia is not able to forgive, Charlie Kinraid is incapable of deep feelings and Philip is dishonest and deceitful, which according to Brodetsky are the worst of these personality flaws, thus causing Philip to suffer more than the other characters (90-1. Italics original). Consequently, Philip dies at the end; his death solves a narrative as well as a moral problem, for his conduct does not entitle him to a happy ending despite the heroic act of saving his rival's life.

[371] Before settling on the title *Sylvia's Lovers*, Gaskell considered calling the novel *Philip's Idol* (*Letters*, 667, 678). Another provisional title was *The Specksioneer*.

idea of "sexual frustration contending for possession of the man against every dictate of religion."[372] John Peck notes that the "denial of a physical dimension to his life", his moderate drinking and his disapproval of sexual promiscuity, actually make him subject to physicality and "disturbing desires."[373]

Philip's amorous feelings for Sylvia are expressed in metaphorical terms that map the linguistic domains of eating and emotional states, presenting love as a need, similar to the need for food.[374] Philip's exhortation: "Give me Sylvia, or else, I die" (SL 121) is not just a hyperbole but a statement of fact; without Sylvia Philip is emotionally and sexually starving. After the narrative events (the alleged death of her true love Charlie Kinraid, her father's death, her mother's increasing dependence on her, and her gratitude to Philip working as kind of coercive measures) lead to Philip and Sylvia's marriage, Philip realises that "the long-desired happiness was not so delicious" (SL 313) as he had thought it would be for the hunger that he has felt is sexually satisfied yet in the emotional sense Philip is still starving. His growing emotional dissatisfaction culminates in the feeling of exclusion of something vital after the birth of their daughter when Philip witnesses his wife talking to their baby, showering her with the love he himself feels deprived of. As the narrator points out, anyone would feel "sorry for the man who lingered long at the door of the room in which his wife sate cooing and talking to her baby, … sorry for the poor listener who was hungering for the profusion of tenderness thus scattered on the senseless air" (SL 325).

Yet it is not only Philip's emotional and sexual hunger that finds its expression in metaphor in the novel. When a whaling ship returns to Monkshaven at the beginning of the narrative after six month's absence some of the returning sailors are "kidnapped"

[372] Lansbury, 160.
[373] Peck, 136.
[374] For more on conceptual linguistic mapping of hunger, food, love and sex, see for example Zoltan Kövecses, *The Language of Love: The Semantics of Passion in Conversational English* (London: Associated University Press, 1988).

(SL 11) straight from their ship by the press-gang and are paraded through the village without a chance to meet with their families and friends. The disappointment and distress of the women in the crowd is shown to transform them from human beings into animal-like creatures who express their feelings with "a lion's growl" (SL 32): "Their wild, famished eyes were strained on faces they might not kiss, their cheeks were flushed to purple with anger…. Some of them looked scarce human; [their] lips…drawn back so as to show the teeth with the unconscious action of an enraged wild animal" (SL 32). Emotional and even sexual frustration is evident in the disappointment of the female characters that are cruelly deprived of their 'food'; their reaction is a reminder of the wild and uncontrollable nature of human appetites, revealing the fine line between the animal and the human. Like hunger for food, also sexual hunger is a reminder of the basically animal nature of human beings; both hungers have been, and still are, strictly controlled by social, cultural, and religious rules. Philip's hunger for Sylvia and especially its manifestations in deceit and selfishness defy the religious and moral laws to the extent that he is finally made to pay for these by his death. The narrative nevertheless reveals that the choice Philip makes between what he knows would be right and what he thinks is better for everybody and especially for himself is not easy. One of the arguments, or rather excuses, he uses when deciding not to reveal that he has witnessed the impressment of Charlie Kinraid, letting everybody believe that he has drowned, are Kinraid's alleged amorous escapades. Philip's judgement of Kinraid as a womaniser and a consumer of women is based on hearsay which nevertheless serves Philip as an excuse to doubt Kinraid's ability to remain faithful to one woman and partly justifies his dislike. By convincing himself that Sylvia would only suffer from any deeper relationship with Kinraid Philip sees himself as saving Sylvia from a destiny as another young woman driven to death by useless hungering for Kinraid's love. Much

like the unfortunate Jeanie in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" who tastes the Goblin fruit and dies pining after it, young women in *Sylvia's Lovers* are rumoured to be falling for the charms of Charlie Kinraid and dying for the want of him after he moves on to his next victim. Among these young women is William Coulson's sister who "died in a six-month" (SL 178) after having been jilted by Charlie Kinraid. To avoid the destiny of Jeanie and Coulson's sister Annie, Sylvia should be kept away from Charlie Kinraid to avoid metaphorical starvation and mental breakdown or even death.[375]

Philip's career in the navy is a short-lived for in a melodramatic turn of the plot, Philip first rescues Charlie Kinraid at the siege of Acre, then hurts himself badly in an accident on board the ship and is sent back to England, disfigured and disillusioned. After a period of convalescence, and two years after his departure, he decides to return to Monkshaven, despite his doubts about going "to a place where nothing but want and wretchedness awaited him unless he made himself known; and if he did, a deeper want, a more woeful wretchedness, would in all probability be his portion" (SL 422). Unable to work because of his injuries, he will be living in poverty and hunger with only his soldier's pension to support his needs unless he reclaims his fortune and former position; if he does make himself known he faces hunger more severe than mere hunger for food. The juxtaposition of the two hungers, for food and for love, also places them in an order of importance; for Philip, hunger for love and emotional lack are more severely felt and have more severe consequences. His return to Monkshaven would be less glorious than in his drunken dream, yet he chooses to return.

[375] To warn her off Kinraid, Sylvia's mother tells her a story about a young woman who fell in love with a sailor who "made a deal on [her]… just to beguile the time like" (SL 173), was jilted by him and who consequently becomes insane. In *Love's Madness* Helen Small discusses the fact that women becoming mentally ill after being jilted by lovers or having lost their love was a very common topic in early nineteenth-century oral and written narratives. See Helen Small, *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

His decision is inspired by a version of the English medieval romance of Sir Guy Warwick and his wife Phillis (or Felice) that he reads in the alms-house where he has been recovering. After many heroic deeds and a pilgrimage Sir Guy returns home disguised as a hermit and lives at the gates of his former home, receiving "his dole of bread" (SL 421) from his wife along with other beggars. When he is dying he sends for his wife who recognises him by a ring she has given him and he dies in her arms. Philip's vision of returning to Monkshaven is a reflection of the medieval romance; in his mind it means that he "could thus see Sylvia, himself unknown, unseen—could live at her gates, so to speak, and gaze upon her and his child—some day too, when he lay a-dying, he might send for her, and in soft words of mutual forgiveness breathe his life away in her arms" (SL 422). Philip thus returns to Monkshaven a poor man, and under a false name, settling in lodgings in another part of the town from his former home and shop and only hoping that he could see "his Phillis, and feast his sad hopeless eyes from time to time with the sight of his child" (SL 422). The legend of the wife living in plenty and giving bread to her unknown husband is repeated with a twist when Philip's daughter is prompted by her mother to give a bun she is holding in her hand to the starving stranger whom she does not recognise, because the "[p]oor man is so hungry, and Bella and mammy have plenty to eat, and to spare" (SL 437).

When Philip saves his daughter from drowning and is fatally injured and his identity is revealed, the remorseful Sylvia, whose feelings towards Philip have softened during his absence and who has learnt to appreciate Philip's love, blames herself for his death: "'Why do yo' cry, Hester?' she said. 'Yo' niver said that yo' wouldn't forgive him as long as yo' lived. Yo' niver broke the heart of him that loved yo', and let him almost starve at yo' very door" (SL 453). The starvation could here be understood both literally and metaphorically, for he has indeed been living almost at her door, famished

with the want of literal food. On the other hand, the lack of emotional reciprocity and the lack of love have metaphorically starved him. Hilary M. Schor states that the narrative of *Sylvia's Lovers* contains several different stories or personal histories which each shape and articulate the characters' narrative destiny.[376] Philip and Sylvia's personal history becomes a story retelling the medieval legend, for it is formed into a local legend told to visitors in the 'now' of the novel's narrative: "A few old people can still tell you the tradition of the man who died in a cottage somewhere about this spot,—died of starvation while his wife lived in hard-hearted plenty not two good stone-throws away" (SL 454). Kestner notes that the legend of starvation can be read as reflecting the Lancashire Cotton Famines of the early 1860s.[377] Yet it is also analogous to the literal famine at the end of the narrative; the narratives of the literal and the metaphorical starvation run parallel in the final chapters of the novel, accentuating Philip's long-lasting 'famine'. Philip is literally hungry for he has no means to purchase food but his hunger is also metaphorical. His "passionate prayer, 'Give me Sylvia, or else, I die'" (SL 121) could now be transfigured into a prayer for food to avoid death. Sylvia's non-existing sympathy for Philip's metaphorical hunger is contrasted with the sympathy she now feels for the victim of literal hunger for "the cruel famine cut sharp enough to penetrate all hearts" (SL 436).

Conclusions

In *Sylvia's Lovers*, the basket of sausages given as a gift articulates communal spirit but at the same time it also gives an identity to both the giver and the recipient. The sausages are a gesture of solidarity but the emphasis on the provenance of the recipe and the origins of Mrs Robson are a means to differentiate her from the Monkshaven

[376] Schor, 162.
[377] Kestner, 200.

community and thus define her identity. On the other hand, the pains that Sylvia takes to decorate the basket and to make the sausages look nice are motivated by her nascent romantic interest in Charley Kinraid whose identity in the mind of Sylvia the gift defines as potential love interest. Giving food or sharing one's food with others are expressions of solidarity and trust in the novel as well as of altruistic hospitality; they are a means to form alliances and enforce allegiances, and to create and recreate a community. The representations of food consumption in the novel express subtle differences of social class and while the local middle-class magnates, the Foster brothers, entertain in a formal style which exemplifies the Bourdieuan middle-class formality, the Corneys, a farming family, entertain in a way which articulates working-class informality. At the Corneys' New Year's party, the large amount of food served and consumed, and the manner in which it is served and consumed, express not only the working-class status of the party but also the changing concepts and trends of entertaining. Sylvia's awkwardness at the supper the Foster brothers give to the newlyweds Philip and Sylvia characterises her as ignorant of the ways of formal food consumption and as an outsider. On the other hand, Molly Burnton's new identity as a married woman now living in Newcastle is expressed in the way she separates herself from her family's foodways. On a larger scale, the New Year's party emphasises differences for the manner of serving food articulates hierarchies among the guests and within the community at large.

In the novel, drinking connotes masculinity and masculine sociability but the characters' attitude to alcohol use also reflects the change in the way drinking is perceived. Drinking differentiates Philip Hepburn from other male characters for his aversion to alcohol defines him as less masculine and even a feminised character and reflects his otherness within the whaling and farming community of Monkshaven,

especially when his class identity is rapidly changing. Despite the apparent nostalgia and the retrospective tolerance of the narrative voice who does not consider the male characters' use of alcohol a corruptive vice, alcohol is also seen as having potentially harmful effects on the mind, which is exemplified by Daniel Robson and Philip Hepburn.

Philip Hepburn might be characterised by his feminine traits but what finally defines him as a character is his obsessive hunger for love. The representations of hunger in the novel are twofold: the descriptions of the literal hunger and its effects at the end of the novel and the metaphorical hunger for romantic and sexual love which runs through the narrative. Sexual and romantic feelings are expressed in metaphorical terms which link the domains of food and love; love is presented as food without which Philip would die of starvation. The end of the novel brings the literal and the metaphorical hungers together and Philip's unsatisfied hunger for Sylvia and his literal starvation in the midst of a famine become a part of a local legend. Philip thus seems defenceless against both metaphorical and literal hunger but the main characters in *Cranford*, which will be discussed next, have found a way to control and to manage their genteel hunger and at the same time police the social boundaries.

6. *Cranford*

Hunger: Elegant Economy

In *Cranford*, both hunger and food consumption are expressions of identity, of belonging to a social group; they are intertwined with and affected by the economics of a group of female characters governed by the blanket rule of elegant economy. Instead of being absent, female hunger in *Cranford* takes a central role; it is suppressed, although not "to demonstrate their incorporeality"[378] but to hide financial distress and to express solidarity between the members of the central social circle. Helena Michie argues that fulfilling the requirements of the ideal womanhood in nineteenth century required certain eating habits: a woman should eat "little and delicately," especially in public.[379] Little and delicate might be the attributes associated with the food served at the tea-parties in *Cranford*, where "[t]he china was delicate eggshell; the old-fashioned silver glittered with polishing; but the eatables were of the slightest description" (C 12), yet the female characters themselves demonstrate less than small and delicate appetites when given the chance to feast. It is true that food consumption patterns in the social gatherings in the novel are linked with gender but an even more crucial linkage is made with class; communal food consumption is characterised by scarcity caused by financial limitations turned into class virtue. Suppressed hunger hides genteel poverty which is a taboo subject in the Cranford society for it means lack of money, and speaking about money, or poverty, is considered bad manners: "We none of us spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor,

[378] Silver, 9.
[379] Michie, *The Flesh Made Word*, 17.

we were all aristocratic" (C7).[380] The choices the characters need to make when it comes to spending money on food provided for guests, for example, have become kind of self-deception and the need to economise is presented as a preference rather than necessity.

The adherence to rules and regulations concerning visiting and socialising as well as living in general is an expression of a social identity in the novel, reflecting the characters' concept of what is proper and genteel and their pecuniary circumstances. Jeffrey Cass argues that by "obsessively focusing on the minutiae of daily life and traditional protocols" the central characters attempt to resist or at least disregard the change of social mores and social and cultural progress in general.[381] It is true that following certain rules and forms in the novel is a manifestation of the refusal or the inability to renounce family or familiar traditions but it also implies a desire to maintain an identity. For example, the changing circumstances of what is left of the late rector Jenkyns' family do not affect the forms of food consumption which are used to emphasise the gentility of the household. Even when the elder of the Jenkyns sisters dies, the younger sister, Miss Matty, continues to follow the elder's household rules concerning food consumption as if paying homage to the deceased: "we constantly adhered to the forms which were observed, at meal-times, in 'my father, the rector's house'" (C 34). Some protocols, such as the rules concerning afternoon calls, are acknowledged publicly by the characters, but the rules of economic necessity remain unacknowledged or rather are transformed into rules of gentility:

[380] The word aristocratic here refers perhaps more to the community of Cranford in where the ladies form the 'aristocracy' than actual rank. The reference to aristocrat is obviously more symbolic than factual for the characters cling to the world of the past in which rank was used to determine social worth and in which 'gentle' and 'common' were social dividers. In reality, the central characters are middle-class, with the exception of Mrs Jamieson, who is the widow of a younger brother of an earl and thus has pretensions to nobility. Next in order are Mrs Forrester who "was born a Tyrrell" and allied "to the Bigges, of Bigelow Hall" (C 76) and the Jenkyns sisters who are "somehow … related to Sir Peter Arley" (C38).
[381] Cass, 418.

> [I]t was considered 'vulgar' (a tremendous word in Cranford) to give anything expensive in the way of eatable or drinkable, at the evening entertainments. Wafer bread-and-butter and sponge-biscuits were all that the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson gave; and she was sister-in-law to the late Earl of Glenmire, although she did practise such 'elegant economy'. (C 8)

The principle of elegant economy uses and even abuses Adam Smith's idea of the impropriety of expressing hunger publicly and the idea of consuming food being finally a 'vulgar' act,[382] by turning lack of money into a public denial of hunger and appetite in the name of gentility.

The definite rules on the standards of collective food consumption of the social community, and the rule that forbids "anything expensive" to be served to guests, are expressions of the group's decision of what the proper standard of food consumption at tea parties is; the decision is influenced by the unarticulated knowledge of the poverty of most of the group's members. The group's way of controlling the proper standard of consumption is the threat of being deemed vulgar; this ensures the members' allegiance to the group's mores for being deemed vulgar would be a social sanction and lead to exclusion from the group. The narrator's comment on the "phraseology of Cranford" (C 8) implies that the characters themselves are aware of the euphemistic use of the phrase 'elegant economy' which in fact reveals the "smart" they attempt to hide: "economy was always 'elegant', and money-spending always 'vulgar and ostentatious'; a sort of sour-grapeism which made us very peaceful and satisfied" (C 8).

Although female hunger and appetite in *Cranford* are mostly camouflaged, they are also expressed both verbally and somatically. It is the narrator who mostly articulates the hunger but it is all the female characters who demonstrate good appetite and appreciation of food. When a tea-tray at Miss Barker's tea-party arrives, it offers a

[382] Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 33.

challenge to the principle of elegant economy and the self-discipline of the guests; its contents exceed the limits of gentility yet the guests seem to accept the fact without protest, overlooking the signs of 'vulgarity' and eating with relish.: "The tea-tray was abundantly loaded – I was pleased to see it, I was so hungry; but I was afraid the ladies present might think it vulgarly heaped up. I know they would have done at their own houses; but somehow the heaps disappeared here" (C 80). In the Victorian middle- and upper-class society, eating greedily or merely with a good appetite was to give a glimpse of the humans' animal nature and therefore it was considered a social faux pas.[383] The scanty fare provided in the public gatherings of the Cranford ladies' society could be seen as reflecting the controlled aesthetics and gentility of the female characters' appetite yet the narrator's verbal comments and the other characters' actions constantly contradict this interpretation. The narrator admits that she is hungry and the fact that "the heaps disappeared" (C 80) implies that so are the other characters.

The final approval for the abundance of the tea-tray comes form Mrs Jamieson, "a baron's daughter-in-law" (C 81) and therefore the pinnacle of gentility, who seems to forgive the offence:

> I saw Mrs Jamieson eating seed cake, … and I was rather surprised, for I knew she had told us, on the occasion of her last party, that she never had it in her house, it reminded her so much of scented soap. She always gave us Savoy biscuits. However, Mrs Jamieson was kindly indulgent to Miss Barker's want of knowledge of the customs of high life; and, to spare her feelings, ate three large pieces of seed-cake. (C 80-1)

Although the narrator conspires with the reader by her tone of voice which invites the reader to adopt an amused point of view towards Mrs Jamieson's, and indeed of all the guests', ill-concealed hunger and even greed when facing a tea-tray loaded with

[383] Lupton, 22.

appetising food, her comments also remind the reader of the narrator's involvement in the social contract of the Cranford society. Gentility, as defined in the Cranford social contract, requires inexpensive food in small quantities and the narrator's comment on Miss Barker's ignorance of the "customs of high life" (C 81) positions her in the social circle of Cranford. Being a former ladies' maid and "a retired milliner" (C 77) who now lives a life of leisure, Miss Barker is not a full member of the genteel inner-circle of the Cranford society, a fact that she herself seems to accept for she "was no democrat, and understood the difference of ranks" (C 77). Nevertheless, the fact that Mrs Jamieson happily consumes the food the amount and quality of which symbolises vulgarity is a manifestation of the fact that the rule that condemns offering larger amounts of eatables does not extend to the consuming of it. The three pieces of seed cake that Mrs Jamieson eats do not diminish her gentility, especially when her food consumption is ironically described as an act of considerateness. When Miss Barker's servant comes in again, this time carrying a loaded supper tray, the guests' tolerance and appetite are put to another test:

> 'Oh, gentility"' thought I, 'can you endure this last shock?' For Miss Barker had ordered … all sorts of good things for supper – scalloped oysters, potted lobsters, jelly, a dish called 'little Cupids' ….In short, we were evidently to be feasted with all that was sweetest and best; and we thought it better to submit graciously, even at the cost of our gentility – which never ate suppers in general, but which, like most non-supper-eaters, was particularly hungry on all special occasions. (C 82)

The acknowledged hunger and the good appetite with which the characters actually consume the food provided reflects the rather thin veneer of their genteel appetites. It could be argued that the Cranford ladies are using a socially and culturally approved way of expressing their economic situation for their 'genteel' approach to food conforms to the nineteenth-century ideal of feminine propriety, that is, to the ideal of a

middle-class woman's non-existing appetite. Nevertheless, in its descriptions of the characters' clearly unfeminine appetite as well as in the direct avowals of hunger the narrative contradicts the ideal.

The absence of female hunger or its articulation is further contested in the novel when Mrs Jamieson invites the ladies of Cranford to tea on a Tuesday evening to meet her sister-in-law Lady Glenmire, and the narrator states how the guests begin to get impatient for their tea, further delayed by Mrs Jamieson's dictatorial butler Mr Mulliner who "does not like to be hurried" (C 93): "We should have liked our tea, for we dined at an earlier hour than Mrs Jamieson" (C 93). The reference to the earlier dinner hour indicates not only a difference in meal times, which in nineteenth-century England fluctuated according to social class, geographical position, and fashion, but also desire for food as well as (female) hunger. Nevertheless, since the decorum forbids female hunger to be pronounced aloud in polite company it is the hunger of Mrs Jamieson's pet dog which will be appeased first: "As soon as Mulliner came in, Carlo began to beg, which was a thing our manners forbade us to do, though I am sure we were just as hungry; and Mrs Jamieson said she was certain we would excuse her if she gave her poor dumb Carlo his tea first" (C 93). The dog is also entitled to have his tea with cream which he prefers to milk, as the narrator pointedly remarks: Mrs Jamieson "told us how intelligent and sensible the dear little fellow was; he knew cream quite well, and constantly refused tea with only milk in it: so the milk was left for us; but we silently thought we were quite as intelligent and sensible as Carlo" (C 93). The guests have to content themselves with milk simply because expressions of hunger, or desire for cream, would be deemed expressions of an animalistic nature, and greed, and therefore improper. The use of elegant economy in the narrative mostly aims at preserving the social stability of the group but it is also be used as a means of characterisation: Mrs

Jamieson's meagre tea-table provided for the human guests somehow clashes with the luxurious 'tea' enjoyed by the pet dog.

Mrs Jamiesons's tea-tray conforms to the principles of elegant economy: "very thin [was] the bread and butter, and very small the lumps of sugar" (C 93). The lumps of sugar are in fact so small that the narrator, who would have preferred "honest, vulgar good-sized" (C 93) pieces, has difficulties in picking up a piece with the sugar-tongs provided and wryly notes that "[s]ugar was evidently Mrs Jamieson's favourite economy" (C 93).[384] Sugar would also have been the non-aristocratic guests' favourite topic of conversation in the absence of the aristocratic Lady Glenmire, a topic they deem not "high enough to interest" her: "There had been a rise in the price of sugar, which, as preserving time was near, was a piece of intelligence to all our housekeeping hearts" (C 92). Sidney Mintz notes that by 1850 sugar had already ceased to be a luxury item and was practically an essential part of English diet.[385] It was produced in the West Indies and thus by slave labour; its price was determined by supply and duties but in the late 1830s also by the final abolition of British slavery in 1838. Since this was the end of virtually free labour, the price of sugar rose for a period.[386] The remark on the sugar price parallels the characters' household economy with the national economy which were both affected by the abolition of slavery.

That the amount of food offered is not enough to satisfy the guests' hunger is evident in the fact that one of them, Lady Glenmire, the only real aristocrat present, actually ventures to ask for more. Her action reveals the constructed idea of the elegant economy in Cranford; she belongs to the gentility proper yet she seems ignorant of the requirements of genteel behaviour for not only does she ring the bell in the first place to

[384] The sugar provided would have been the more expensive white sugar which was available in cone-shaped loaves from which lumps would be cut.
[385] Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (London: Penguin Books, 1985) 148.
[386] See for example Freeman, 91 or Mintz, 68.

have the tea brought in, thus giving an expression to the desire of the other guests, but when she asks for more food to be offered she is literally articulating their hunger: "We were thankful to Lady Glenmire for having proposed some more bread and butter, and this mutual want made us better acquainted with her than we should ever have been with talking about the Court" (C 94). It is thus communal hunger, the "mutual want" that the female guests share, which connects them across the rank divide.

It is true, of course, that the 'want' of the Cranford ladies and their pecuniary limitations are relative; unlike the poor working class characters in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, they are not acutely starving to death. Nevertheless, the same social order that denied the severity and the reasons behind working-class hunger, deeming it to be the result of failure in morals or industriousness, did in a way deny the hunger of the impoverished genteel, single or widowed, women as well. The acknowledged fact was that there was a surplus of women in Victorian England, a fact that surfaced in different discourses of the era. Edward John Tilt, for example, notes in *Elements of Health, and Principles of Female Hygiene* on "the excess of females" in Great Britain, and even in the whole world.[387] He argues that the surplus of women is not accidental but "providental": as with bees, so do humans need "labourers, nurses" to increase the well being of not only the sick but of "the human race" in general.[388] What to do with single women or childless widows seems to have occupied the minds of the Victorians, not so much from the financial point of view but more from the point of view of utility. Marriage and motherhood were seen as the duty of a woman yet not all women had the opportunity, or the wish, to get married, and the society had difficulties to see other options for a woman who could or would not get a husband. Nevertheless, women who

[387] Tilt, 16. Tilt argues that women not only live longer but also bear illnesses better than males (17), which is interesting considering the general idea of women as the weaker sex, both mentally and physically, prevalent in the Victorian era. Not surprisingly, Tilt further contends that when it comes to upper classes, the situation is reverse (20).
[388] Tilt, 18.

were actively seeking a husband either for themselves or for a relative were often ridiculed,[389] or sometimes the failure to find a husband was considered the fault of the women who were too proud and too picky, or too indolent to take on the duties of a married woman, or too afraid of losing their social position, as William Rathbone Greg explains in *Why Are Women Redundant?* (1869).[390] At the same time, the options for middle- and upper-class women to support themselves by working were extremely limited and a woman who was not financially supported by a male relative or, as in Miss Matty's case, who lost one's income would face the difficult question of how "to earn or add to a living without materially losing caste" (C 154).[391] The society formed by the ladies is defined by "lack of husbands and children," as Croskery points out.[392] Yet as Caroline M. Jackson-Houlston notes, despite the narrator professing Cranford to be a society without men, they actually "appear much more often than one would anticipate".[393] It is the lack and the absence of men in the romantic and sexual sense from the lives of the main female characters, either unmarried or widowed, that is also turned into an elegant economy according to which they themselves are "quite sufficient" (C 5) and men more or less "vulgar" (C 11).

The same year that *Cranford* was published in one volume, a short story by Gaskell called "Morton Hall" (1853) appeared in *Household Words*. In the story, the two remaining members of a once wealthy family, Miss Phillis and her nephew, live in

[389] See, for example, Frances Power Cobbe, *Essays on the Pursuits of Women*, (London: Emily Faithful, 1863) 65.
[390] William Rathbone Greg, *Why Are Women Redundant?* (London: N. Trübner & Co, 1869) 18. Greg saw this as a problem specifically among the middle- and upper-class women.
[391] Caroline P. Huber reads *Cranford* as Gaskell's attempt to present a female utopia in which "to be old and single and poor does not mean privation, isolation, and degradation" (Caroline P. Huber, "'Heroic Pioneers': The Ladies of *Cranford*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 21 (2007) 42). On the other hand, in 1963, Martin Dodsworth argued in a somewhat Freudian analysis of *Cranford* that "Cranford is a kind of trimmed and tidied dream, in which Mrs Gaskell's unconscious hostility to the male struggles with her awareness of the pointlessness of such hostility" (Martin Dodsworth, "Women Without Men at Cranford," *Essays in Criticism* 13 (1963) 138).
[392] Croskery, 208. Or as Auerbach puts it, the Cranford ladies suffer from both "sexual and financial poverty" (86).
[393] Caroline M. Jackson-Houlston, "*Cranford*: Elizabeth Gaskell's Most Radical Novel?" *The Gaskell Society Journal* 23 (2009) 19.

genteel poverty in a cottage attached to the land of the main house after the family's fortune has dwindled. Although seemingly undernourished, as the narrator notes, they reject the eggs the narrator and her sister secretly leave on their porch where the eggs are found "all shattered and splashed" (MH 49) the following morning. Socially superior yet economically inferior to the narrator and her sister, as well as to the rest of the local people, their hunger remains unarticulated until on a visit Miss Phillis swallows her social pride and confesses to the narrator that "we are starving! we are starving for want of food!" (MH 50). Despite the baskets of food the sisters thenceforth reverently take to her and her nephew, Miss Phillis is so severely malnourished that she actually dies of hunger. Her starvation and her death are the results of an attempt to preserve a certain social status in a situation in which no means of respectable livelihood are available. Interestingly, in "Morton Hall" the role of the male relative is not that of a rescuer but of a co-sufferer; social pride combined with the inability to earn his living or the reluctance to renounce the status of a leisured gentleman leads to starvation.

The fact that due to pecuniary constraints a hostess in *Cranford* has to prepare for the party herself with the help of "one little charity-school maiden" (C 7) is overlooked by the guests in the name of preserving the illusion of conspicuous leisure and the group's social identity as members of the gentry: the hostess "sat in state, pretending not to know what cakes were sent up, though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge-cakes" (C 7). The collective denial of the unpleasant fact that the hostess actually has to perform household tasks herself instead of having servants to perform them saves not only their hostess's face but also the face of the whole social group. The group's behaviour defines and enforces its identity as

respectably genteel and signals the hostess's position as a member of the group. The hunger that is simmering under the cover of the 'elegant economy' represents the need to keep up the appearances of a respectable, and genteel, household. In *Cranford*, limited income means limitations in the amount of money used for food consumption; the need to keep up appearances of gentility outstrips the need, and obvious desire for food.

Oranges, Peas, and Tea: Self and the Other

Miss Barker provides her guests with ungenteel plenty of food but she also provides them with a drink the guests approach with suspicion. After feeding her guests Miss Barker finally proposes a drink of cherry-brandy with which the other characters are unfamiliar:

> We none of us had ever seen such a thing, and rather shrank back when she proffered it us – 'just a little, leetle glass, ladies; after the oysters and lobsters, you know. Shellfish are sometimes thought not very wholesome.' (C 82)

The guests' ignorance of cherry-brandy, which is basically brandy in which cherries have been infused, and their initial reluctance to taste it can be seen as a refusal to enter into an unknown territory when it comes to food and drink; incorporating unknown substances threatens both their class and gender identities. Since they profess ignorance of the drink, their behaviour implies uncertainty about how to react to and unwillingness to engage in a practice that might not be proper for genteel ladies. The narrator's use of the pronoun 'they' when she refers to the drink: "the beverage they call cherry-brandy" (C 82) further emphasises the guests' ignorance and even their detachment from the world where beverages such as cherry-brandy are consumed. Miss Barker's allusion to its digestive properties emphasises its medicinal quality and transfers the alcoholic drink

from the sphere of unknown and possibly threatening into that of the more familiar. Nevertheless, it is only after the example of the leading lady of the society that the guests give in: "We all shook our heads like female mandarins; but, at last, Mrs Jamieson suffered herself to be persuaded, and we followed her lead. It was not exactly unpalatable, though so hot and so strong that we thought ourselves bound to give evidence that we were not accustomed to such things by coughing terribly" (C 82-3). The coughing is an indication of the guests' moral duty to express their reservations about the whole procedure especially when middle-class ladies were not expected to drink spirits.[394] When one of the guests points out, after first emptying her glass, that the beverage tastes very strong the hostess again transfers the drink from the sphere of an unknown substance to the domestic one:

> 'It's very strong,' said Miss Pole, as she put down her empty glass; 'I do believe there's spirit in it.'
> 'Only a little drop – just necessary to make it keep,' said Miss Barker. 'You know we put brandy-paper over our preserves to make them keep. I often feel tipsy myself from eating damson tart.' (C 83)

By giving different excuses to serving and drinking cherry-brandy, Miss Barker attempts to legitimise its use. This particular alcoholic beverage might be unknown in the social circles of Cranford yet the use of alcohol as a digestive or in preserving fruit is known and by reminding her guests of this she is legitimising the serving and consuming of cherry-brandy.

Food is a way to define one's self but it is also a way to define the other, that is, the one whose eating habits are different. The anxiety over Miss Matty's former suitor

[394] Yet the taste of brandy would not have been so unfamiliar to the guests who earlier in the evening consume "little Cupids" which are almond biscuits soaked in brandy and which do not inspire any suspicious reactions. If the narrator of "The Last Generation in England" is to be believed, ladies of the earlier generations were more inclined to indulge in spirits. In the sketch, an old cookbook owned by one of the characters gives recipes for beverages which the Victorians would have deemed far from lady-like: "Our grandmothers must have been strong-headed women, for there were numerous receipts for 'ladies' beverages,' &c., generally beginning with 'Take a gallon of brandy, or any other spirit'" (LG 194-5).

Mr Holbrook's trip to Paris and the harmful effects French food might have on him implies anxiety over the possible threat to his identity: "'I wish he would not go to Paris,' said Miss Matilda anxiously. 'I don't believe frogs will agree with him; he used to have to be very careful what he ate, which was curious in so strong-looking a young man'"(C 47). Frogs here represent not only a specific, and obviously very suspect, edible commodity but they are also an emblem of the French people, society, and culture as a whole. The fear that eating French food will be physically hazardous implies the fear of it being also hazardous to his identity as an Englishman. By incorporating French food, Mr Holbrook would incorporate Frenchness and become less English in the process. Ironically enough, some time after his journey to Paris Mr Holbrook falls ill and dies, not because of indigestible food, but because Paris had been "quite too much for him" (C 48). After his return he neglects his usual occupations and "sits with his hands on his knees in the counting-house, not reading or anything, but only saying what a wonderful city Paris was!" (C 48). It seems that it is the food for the mind that he has incorporated that has lethal results rather than the food for the body.

The food one consumes and incorporates is crucial to one's concept of the self but it is also the way food is consumed that constructs and sustains identities. The consumption of oranges poses a problem in *Cranford* because of the contradiction between what is the proper manner to eat them and what is the best way to enjoy them:

> Miss Jenkyns did not like to cut the fruit; for, as she observed, the juice all ran out nobody knew where; sucking (only I think she used some more recondite word) was in fact the only way of enjoying oranges; but then there was the unpleasant association with a ceremony frequently gone through by little babies; and so, after dessert, in orange season, Miss Jenkyns and Miss Matty used to rise up, possess themselves each of an orange in silence, and withdraw to the privacy of their own rooms to indulge in sucking oranges. (C 34-5)

The proper way of eating oranges, like many other fruit, at the Victorian dinner table was to use the knife and fork; only berries could be eaten with fingers. Eating fruits such as oranges with hands only would necessarily be messy and produce eating noises which, as Lupton points out, were considered improper, as were any teeth marks visible to other diners on fruit or any other article of food.[395] The adherence to certain procedures when eating fruit and the avoidance of any manifestations of the body in the form of sounds, such as the sound of sucking, or imprints on food reflect the aim to negate the role of the body and its animalistic needs. Miss Jenkyns's insistence that the oranges be eaten in private to ensure maximum enjoyment reflects both the need to hide a bodily action and the wish to relish one's food. This wish stresses the contradiction between the constructed social codes of public behaviour and the need and ability to enjoy one's food beyond the nutritional need. The mouth as an organ is the site of eating and speaking but it is also an erotic organ; it is "integral to erotic pleasure in the acts of kissing, licking and sucking."[396] The importance of enjoying the oranges implies enjoyment of oral pleasures and the sensations they bring. The need to eat the oranges in private can be seen as the need to avoid public expression and public exposure of one's appetite and desire for not only food but also for erotic oral pleasure through food substitute.

To avoid impropriety, the consumption of oranges is removed from the sphere reserved for food consumption to a more private sphere, the characters' bedrooms. Meir reads the privacy the eating of oranges requires as having sexual implications, contending that "Miss Jenkyns's regulations turn a dinner table act into a bedroom act."[397] Nevertheless, Miss Jenkyns's reluctance to publicly engage in a practice that reminds her of breastfeeding reflects not only her allegiance to social decorum and to

[395] Lupton, 22.
[396] Lupton, 18.
[397] Meir, "'Household Forms and Ceremonies', 9.

"the severe patriarchal code which … [she] inherits from her remote, adored father" [398] but even more her relationship with the maternal; it can be seen as an expression of if not the denial of the maternal and the maternal feeding power at least of a stronger identification with the paternal. Miss Jenkyns is characterised as "a strong-minded woman" (C 18) who had been "the favourite of her father" (C 62) and whose mother had been "a little afraid of [her] … superior acquirements" (C 62). She becomes her father's assistant and leaves the more feminine household tasks to her sister. Deborah Lupton points out that psychoanalytic theories link food and eating with feelings, considering the mother/child relationship as an important basis of one's concept of food consumption and one's self.[399] The mother/child relationship is fundamentally also a feeder/fed relationship where the feeder not only feeds but also produces the food. This fact blurs the boundary between what is food and what is not as well as the boundary between nature and culture. Kelly Oliver argues that mother's milk is a symbol of both animality and a symbol of dependence and unity with the maternal body.[400] Thus giving up sucking the maternal breast and mother's milk can be seen as an exit from a symbiotic relationship with one's feeder and an entrance to a relationship with food that according to Claude Fischler is marked with "anxiety" about food, food choices and identity.[401] Miss Jenkyns's strict adherence to the rules of propriety concerning the consumption of oranges and the need to "indulge in sucking oranges" (C 35) in private rather than in public can be seen as a form of declaration of independence.

In Lacanian theory, the exit from the symbiotic relationship with the maternal (breast) is followed by something called a mirror stage which begins the gradual

[398] Auerbach, 82. According to Auerbach, after Miss Jenkyns's death the "leadership" of the society passes to Miss Matty and "the town becomes feminine as well as female" (82).
[399] Lupton, 44
[400] Kelly Oliver, "Nourishing the Speaking Subject: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Abominable Food and Women," *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food*, eds. Deane W. Curtin and Lisa M. Heldke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) 74.
[401] Fischler, 278.

entrance to the world of language and the paternal with its restrictions and control. According to Oliver, in the Western cultures the end of the symbiotic relationship with the feeding mother, the nature, can be seen as the entrance to culture and language.[402] The problematic relationship with the sucking noises and sights that Miss Jenkyns has in *Cranford* can be seen as an indication of her identification with the paternal/masculine culture which is reflected in her use of language which she has learnt from her father. On the other hand, Davidoff and Hall state that although "breastfeeding was being promoted on both medical and religious grounds, the supreme act of motherhood, yet modesty made its performance indelicate. Suckling in public became increasingly associated with working-class practice."[403] Thus Miss Jenkyns's unwillingness to be associated with the sounds and acts reminiscent of babies' feeding procedure can be seen as not only the wish to sustain her identity as separate from the maternal but also as a wish to enforce and express her middle-class identity.

Another problem of how to consume food is presented during a visit to Mr Holbrook when the dinner brings out the problem of how to eat peas. Mr Holbrook owns an "estate" but as his cousin Miss Pole explains, his "property was not large enough to entitle him to rank higher than a yeoman; or rather … he had refused to push himself on, as so many of his class had done, into the ranks of the squires" (C 37). The distinction Miss Pole makes between a yeoman and a squire is significant for according to Robin Gilmour, in the traditional social hierarchy based on rank, a yeoman would not have been entitled to the title of a gentleman; a yeoman was a lower rank than a gentleman whereas a squire was a higher one.[404] Consequently, when Mr Holbrook in his youth proposed to and was rejected by Miss Matty her rejection of the offer of

[402] Oliver, 74.
[403] Davidoff and Hall, 399.
[404] Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981) 5.

marriage had been more her family's rejection of him and his rank for he "would not have been enough of a gentleman for the rector and Miss Jenkyns" (C 38). The dinner at Mr Holbrook's house is served in what the narrator suspects has once been the kitchen with "cupboards all around" and an "oven and a few other appurtenances of kitchen, which were evidently never used, the real cooking-place being at some distance" (C 41-2). There is thus no formal dining room in the house but a room that is reminiscent of a place where food is actually cooked.

Genteel table manners are put to a test when the main course of duck at the dinner offered to the guests at Mr Holbrook's house is accompanied with green peas. Kent Puckett notes that since peas as a commodity were available to all regardless of social class, it was the manner of eating them that became a mark of social standing.[405] The guests, who have knives and "two-pronged, black handled forks" (C 43) to consume the peas, each come up with a difference solution: "Miss Matty picked up her peas, one by one, on the point of the prongs, … Miss Pole sighed over her delicate young peas as she left them on one side of her plate untasted, for they *would* drop between the prongs" (C 43). The narrator, however, follows the example of the host who eats the peas with his knife: "the peas were going wholesale into his capacious mouth, shovelled up by his large round-ended knife. I saw, I imitated, I survived! My friends, in spite of my precedent, could not muster up courage enough to do an ungenteel thing" (C 43). The use of cutlery is one dimension of transforming the fundamentally animal act of eating into a stylised social ceremony.[406] According to Davidoff and Hall, nineteenth-century middle-class identity could be read not only in "personal cleanliness and modesty" but also in table manners which "were a test of

[405] Kent Puckett, *Bad Form: Social Mistakes and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 38.
[406] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 196.

status" as well as a sign of inclusion.[407] As Norbert Elias points out, table manners measure the degree of civility but also reflect how civilised is defined in any given era;[408] in the nineteenth century, putting the knife into one's mouth was already considered improper: the knife was to be used for cutting only and according to polite usage it was not to touch one's mouth. Miss Matty chooses a technique that does not compromise her gentility but allows her to consume at least some of the peas. Miss Pole, on the other hand, surrenders to the requirements of gentility without a fight and leaves the peas uneaten although her decision obviously leaves her unsatisfied both metaphorically and literally. The narrator's choice to imitate the host breaks the rules of decorum; it indicates the fact that the narrator is prioritising substance and surrendering to the animal instinct of hunger and desire for food. The words 'I survived' express her social survival but they disclose the ultimate purpose of edible commodities as well: one has to eat to survive. When form, in this case the proper table manners, is prioritised, hunger and desire for food are not only denied but also left unsatisfied. Thomas E. Recchio suggests that the peas left uneaten reflect the "life-denying potential of inappropriate gentility", symbolising Miss Matty's "untasted" life after rejecting Mr Holbrook's proposal.[409] Thus the narrator's consumption of the peas regardless of proper manners would reflect her potential for a life with physical satisfaction.

Mr Holbrook, who the narrator describes as being "heartily hungry" (C 43), does not notice the problems of consuming the peas. His behaviour is nevertheless registered by the guests and Miss Pole points out to the others that "he has got into very uncouth habits with living alone" (C 43) whereas Miss Matty just sees him as "eccentric" (C 44). Nevertheless, Mr Holbrook's table manners could also classify him as old-fashioned for

[407] Davidoff and Hall, 399.
[408] Elias, 85.
[409] Thomas E. Recchio, "*Cranford* and 'The Lawe of Kynde'," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 1 (1987), 21-2.

as Margaret Visser points out, a knife with a rounded blade was still used to carry food to the mouth, especially food such as peas, in England in the eighteenth century.[410] According to Visser, even some conduct books such as the American Eliza Ware Farrar's *The Young Lady's Friend*, published in the 1830s, reassured the reader that eating with knife is not ungenteel if done correctly. This was obviously an American view on the matter for as Visser points out the later English edition, edited for the British public, omitted the sanction of using knives.[411] Since most American habits seemed 'uncouth' to the British public, using a knife to carry food to the mouth would have been another indication of the lack of proper manners. Yet Mr Holbrook's eccentric table manners can be seen more as an indication of his adherence to habits of the past: "He rejected all domestic innovations… [and] despised every refinement which had not its root deep down in humanity" (C 37). Like the order of the dishes served, having "pudding before meat" (C 42), or the fact that the forks only have two prongs when according to Patricia Ingham forks had developed into four-prong ones by 1800,[412] eating peas with the knife classify him and the household as old-fashioned rather than uncouth.

The word 'refinement' has a dual meaning in the narrative for it can simply be seen as referring to improving or modifying an existing product or method of farming, for example, thus emphasising Mr Holbrook's resistance to change. The word can nevertheless be read as referring to manners, taste and feelings and in this sense he would be opposing pretentious and empty symbolics of acquired manners as opposed to

[410] Visser, 188. Puckett argues that the problematics of eating peas with a knife in *Cranford* illustrates the difference between "old-fashioned and newfangled", a difference which he sees as reflecting the novel's general theme (27-8).
[411] Visser, 191-2.
[412] Patricia Ingham, Notes, *Cranford* (London: Penguin Books, 2005) 240. The habit of having pudding, usually suet pudding, before meat was a Northern England custom; the pudding would fill the stomach before the more expensive meat would be brought to table.

Miss Jenkyns's "more artificial code of gentility."[413] It is the ignorance of or at least the willingness to ignore the contrived rules of behaviour that makes him less of a gentleman in the eyes of society. Nevertheless, even if his table manners are not in accordance with the requirements of the polite society and he speaks loudly using "the dialect of the country in perfection, and constantly used it in conversation" (C 37) the narrative emphasises his innate qualities as a gentleman. His sitting room is filled with books; he could "read aloud more beautifully and with more feeling than anyone she [Miss Pole] had heard" (C 38) and he surprises the narrator by "repeating apt and beautiful quotations from the poets … as naturally as if he were thinking aloud" (C 41).

Although tea-tables and tea trays are mentioned several times by the narrator, tea as a beverage is not specified nor are there representations of tea-time rituals performed by the female characters. If the rituals of the tea-table are seen as a metaphor for the nurturing role of the nineteenth-century middle- and upper-class women and as "a symbol of middle-class English domesticity"[414], the absence of scenes of tea-table ceremonies might indicate the unnurturing and non-maternal role of the central female characters in the novel who are all either unmarried or widowed and no children are mentioned. Tea-parties or tea trays in the novel usually imply food, or rather the small amount of it, and the anticipation of the arrival of tea is more the anticipation of the arrival of the food that accompanies it. The narrator constantly comments on the substance and amount of food that is brought in on the tray as well as how hungry she and the other characters are: in fact, in her vocabulary tea seems to connote accompaniment to food rather than the other way round. The one instance when tea-time is marked not by the expectation of food but with the appearance of the actual tea-urn is when the bank in which Miss Matty's money is invested has failed and the

[413] Croskery, 214.
[414] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 95.

narrator and Miss Matty need to think the matter over: "We had too much to think about to talk much that afternoon…. But when the tea-urn was brought in a new thought came into my head. Why should not Miss Matty sell tea – be an agent to the East India Tea Company which then existed?" (C 156). Tea-urns were part of the middle- and upper-class tea ceremonies, holding hot water for mixing with the tea brewed in the kitchen, and as Sarah Freeman points out, they were costly and reflected the consuming power and the social class of the owners. Freeman further notes that the use of a tea-urn implied the need for a large amount of hot water to accommodate all the family members or guests.[415] The use of a tea-urn in *Cranford* for two characters only seems exaggerated yet it implies adherence to the forms of the tea-table and although a relic of Miss Matty's past as a member of a larger and more affluent household, it is an expression of her social identity.

When tea as a commodity is referred to, as in the case of the appearance of the tea-urn, or when it is specified in the narrative it is usually in an economic context, that is, in the context of buying or selling it. In the narrator's mind the tea-urn does not connote tea as a drink but a possibility to earn and make a living. Although selling implies trade and trade connotes vulgarity in the context of the fictional community of Cranford, Miss Matty eventually agrees to the plan of running a small tea-shop. Surprisingly, considering the importance put on the avoidance of vulgarity and commerce, her initial reluctance towards the proposal is "not on account of any personal loss of gentility involved" (C 167) but on account of doubts about coping with the actual shop-keeping. If tea connoted middle-class, domesticity, and femininity in the nineteenth-century, as Fromer contends,[416] then tea as a commercial article might

[415] Freeman, 85.
[416] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 11-14. According to Erika Rappaport, nineteenth-century tea advertising promoted the idea of tea, or more specifically the rituals connected with tea, as "female and private" (Erika Rappaport, 134-135).

disturb Miss Matty's class image but it does not remove her from the domestic, middle-class, and feminine sphere she is familiar with. Tea is going to be sold from her home: a dining room is "converted into a shop, without any of its degrading characteristics; a table was to be the counter" (C 166-7) and the small sign informing that she is licensed to sell tea is "hidden under the lintel" (C169). The process which minimises the signs of 'trade' also minimises Miss Matty's connection with it and preserves a resemblance of domesticity. In *Cranford*, tea as a beverage has gender connotations: both consuming and purchasing tea is predominantly a female issue, and when agreeing on the plan to open a tea shop, Miss Matty consoles herself with the idea that with tea as the article to be sold she does not have to do business with men: "One good thing about it was, she did not think men ever bought tea; and it was of men particularly she was afraid" (C 167).

When the local grocer graciously advertises her shop as having "all the choice sorts" (C 170) of tea to sell, the narrator points out how the best teas were often required by the less genteel female customers: "[e]xpensive tea is a very favourite luxury with well-to-do tradespeople and rich farmers' wives, who turn up their noses at the Congou and Souchong prevalent at many a genteel table, and will have nothing else than Gunpowder and Pekoe for themselves" (C 170). In the nineteenth century, tea was appreciated by all social classes but Freeman argues that the lower classes were especially concerned about the quality of the tea they purchased, even to the extent that they were willing "to make sacrifices to have it".[417] Presumably, these sacrifices were financial in nature, that is, the lower classes were willing to use a fairly large part of their income on tea. The preference for expensive teas is an indication of the characters'

[417] Freeman, 85. According to Freeman Gunpowder was "the most expensive tea on the market" (87). Burnett notes that tax on tea was gradually lowered in the nineteenth century and tea became a staple product in the diet of the working classes (*Liquid Pleasures*, 59).
[417] Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury*, 95.

consuming power and of snobbery as well as awareness of how their consumption defines them. Buying more expensive luxury teas than the "gentility" can be seen as the Veblenesque social emulation with a twist; instead of following the consuming patterns of the class above they actually are depicted as surpassing them.

According to the narrator, one of the advantages of the tea-shop scheme is the fact that "[t]ea was neither greasy nor sticky – grease and stickiness being two of the qualities which Miss Matty could not endure" (C 156-7). Mary Douglas points out that sticky is ambiguous because it is neither liquid nor solid and if touched it both clings and falls off; in a sense it both becomes and does not become part of one's self: "it attacks the boundary between myself and it."[418] If the qualities of tea are something Miss Matty can endure and identify with then her reluctance to face stickiness and grease serves as a defence mechanism against the threat of the other that she is not prepared to face and her dislike of stickiness is a way to reject the ambiguity and to define the boundaries of her self. Deborah Anna Logan argues that greasy and sticky were "qualities denigrated for their associations with tradespeople,"[419] and Miss Matty's reluctance to associate herself and to be associated with such qualities would express the need to enforce not only the boundaries of her individual identity but also of her class identity. Her inability to face stickiness approaches the Kristevan concept of abjection which here works as cultural "primer", enforcing her sense of self as well as her socio-cultural position.[420]

Miss Matty's dislike of certain substances as well as her suspicions of foreign food can be seen as an attempt to preserve her identity. Her dislike of green tea, on the other hand, is based on beliefs concerning its effect on the actual body: "If she was

[418] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 39.
[419] Deborah Anna Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998) 195.
[420] Kristeva, 2.

made aware that she had been drinking green tea at any time, she always thought it her duty to lie awake half through the night afterward (I have known her take it in ignorance many a time without such effects), and consequently green tea was prohibited the house" (C 143). Miss Matty's prejudice inspires her to attempt to prevent others from consuming green tea, she "plaintively entreated some of her customers not to buy green tea – running it down as a slow poison, sure to destroy the nerves, and produce all manner of evil" (C 171). The narrator tries to argue for the more benevolent effects of green tea and attempts to convince Miss Matty not to deprecate it to prevent financial losses: "I was driven to my wits' end for instances of longevity entirely attributable to a persevering use of green tea" (C 171). Although the narrator implies that Miss Matty's concern is nothing but ignorant prejudice, drinking green tea in the evening may indeed keep some drinkers awake yet the effect as a stimulant also depends on the variety of the tea. In the nineteenth century, the effects of green tea were discussed with sometimes conflicting points of view. Sigmond, for example, points out various, slightly contradictory effects of drinking green tea. He claims that if drunk late in the evening, it produces "incubus or night-mare in its most formidable shape"[421]; he also states that green tea can be used as "an antisoporific", that is, as a substance that stimulates enough to prevent falling asleep.[422] On the other hand, he argues that green tea can be used to medically treat women: to regulate the heart beat instead of digitalis as well as to cure "nervous disorders".[423] In the nineteenth-century context, Miss Matty's seemingly conjectural concept of green tea being "slow poison" might nevertheless have had a grain of truth in it. Green tea as a substance was no more poisonous than it is today but

[421] Sigmond, 127. The publishing year of Sigmond's book, 1839, is significant in the sense that this is the year when the "first shipment of Indian-grown tea was auctioned on the London tea market" (Fromer, "'Deeply Indebted to the Tea-Plant'," 535).
[422] Sigmond, 127. He claims that green tea is powerful enough even to "resist the narcotic effects of opium, when it has been too largely taken" (127).
[423] Sigmond, 120.

the nineteenth-century practice of food adulteration could have resulted in it becoming mildly so. Foodstuffs as well as beverages were regularly adulterated in Victorian Britain, often to enhance the appearance of the product. Both black and green tea might have been dyed, in fact, Freeman argues that green tea "was virtually always 'glazed' or 'lacquered' with colouring containing Prussian blue"[424] which she classifies as "a mild poison".[425] Drinking green tea in nineteenth-century England might thus have produced "all manner of evil" (C 171) to the constitution of the consumer.

Despite the connotations of Englishness, middle-class domesticity and femininity that tea had, it was finally a foreign commodity, the cultural and oriental other. It was imported from the East yet it became a part of the national identity of the English. In *Cranford* its exotic origins are present only in the names of the different varieties of tea and in the "cabalistic inscriptions" (C 169) on the boxes of tea in Miss Matty's tea shop as well as in the name of the East India Company whose agent Miss Matty becomes. The Oriental other does nevertheless penetrate the society of Cranford in other forms, first in the form of Signor Brunoni, an itinerant conjurer, and then in the form of Miss Matty's brother, Peter, who returns from India at the end of the narrative. Signor Brunoni, who appears on the stage "in the Turkish costume" (C 103) and speaks "very broken English" (C 104) is finally revealed to be an Englishman called Samuel Brown who has served in the Britsh army in India. Even as a foreigner he has two identities: he is the "close-shaved Christian gentleman" (C 104) who speaks "such pretty broken English" (C 100) that Miss Pole meets when having a nose round the venue before the performance and the "Mussulman" (C 104) with a beard who appears on the stage. Signor Brunoni's visit to Cranford coincides with a series of incidents that

[424] Freeman, 87.
[425] Freeman, 29. Erika Rappaport points out that especially green tea was adulterated by both the British retailers and the Chinese producers (126). Sometimes tea was also 'made' out of used tea leaves or leaves of trees and plants other than the tea bush; as Sigmond points out some of these ingredients, such as "deadly nightshade", were actually poisonous (60). Deadly nightshade is another name for belladonna.

make him the centre of speculation. Cranford suffers from 'a crime wave', there are "one or two robberies" (C 107) which cause panic and speculations among the characters to the extent that they, as Maeve E. Adams points out, "invent crimes" to support their speculations,[426] and who comfort themselves by the idea that "the robberies could never have been committed by any Cranford person; it must have been a stranger or strangers who brought this disgrace upon the town, and occasioned as many precautions as if we were living among the Red Indians or the French" (C 108). One of the characters makes deductions concerning Signor Brunoni and ends up with the conclusion that he must be "a Frenchman – a French spy come to discover the weak and undefended places of England" (C 108-9). Miss Matty's fear of French food is here repeated with a vengeance: the French are a threat to the national security. Yet when after a road accident Signor Brunoni is revealed to be an ordinary Englishman and in need of the help of the Cranford ladies, the rumours and speculations end. He is transformed from the threatening other to a representative of the English.

When Miss Matty's brother, Peter Jenkyns, returns from India after thirty years of absence he has acquired habits that the Cranford ladies find strange yet appealing: he prefers to sit cross-legged on the floor and he tells them fantastic and exaggerated tales of his life in India which the narrator recognises as such but the more credulous ladies consider not only entertaining but also truthful. In a way they believe Peter's tales because, as Lansbury points out, they correspond with and enforce their "own vision of distant lands."[427] The narrator notes that Peter's "ways of eating were a little strange amongst such ladies as Miss Pole, and Miss Matty, and Mrs Jamieson, especially when I recollected the untasted green peas and two-pronged forks at poor Mr Holbrook's

[426] Maeve E. Adams, "The Amazon Warrior Woman and the De/construction of Gendered Imperial Authority in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Literature," *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 6.1 (Spring 2010), n 22.
[427] Lansbury, 93.

dinner" (C 181). The reference to the proper way of eating peas implies that Peter Jenkins's way of eating food is unconventional perhaps even to the extent that he uses his hands in addition to, or instead of cutlery. If the use of cutlery as well as general adherence to form when it comes to consuming food is essential for constructing and sustaining especially middle- and upper-class social identities, as Bourdieu contends,[428] then Peter's exotic Indian eating habits construct another kind of identity and blur the boundaries of his social self. The absence of any references to Indian food, either in the context of a visit from Miss Matty's cousin, Major Jenkyns and his wife who have lived thirty years in India even having brought back with them "a Hindoo body-servant" (C 36), or Peter Jenkyns's return is noteworthy, especially considering the fact that curry, for example, became "naturalised" to the extent that even domestic cookbooks had begun to treat it as part of the English national diet by the mid-nineteenth century.[429] Curry, like tea, was thus transformed into part of English culture; the transformation being part of the larger act of colonial incorporation. That no curries are introduced to the tables of Cranford shows perhaps the resistance to progress, including food trends, endemic to a world that seems self-sufficient in many ways. Yet it also shows the geographical and cultural distance from the places where food trends are constructed and sustained for as Susan Zletnick notes, it was especially the "urban bourgeoisie" on whose tables curry became a staple dish.[430]

Peter's acquired otherness is nevertheless not a threat to the composure and the stability of the Cranford society; as the narrator points out, "[t]hey liked him the better, indeed, for being what they called 'so very Oriental'" (C 180). His arrival from the colonies saves Miss Matty from poverty although he is not rich: "he had enough to live

[428] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 196.
[429] Susan Zlotnick, ""Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England," *The Recipe Reader: Narratives, Contexts, Traditions*, eds. Janet Floyd and Laurel Forster (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010) 81.
[430] Zlotnick, 80.

upon ‘very genteelly’ at Cranford; he and Miss Matty together” (C 179). According to Maeve E. Adams, his return from the colonies also brings back “social order” to the ‘Amazonian’ community of Cranford: it “need[s] to be saved by white men.”[431] In a sense Peter does save Miss Matty and more importantly fully restores her gentility by repositioning her back into being a sister who is supported by the nearest male relative instead of being a genteel spinster of no means and no real possibilities to make a genteel living on her own. When giving up selling tea, an imported article from the east, she acquires the means of living through Peter who can be seen as another ‘import’ from the east where he has earned enough as “an indigo planter” (C 178) to support both the siblings. Unlike males like her brother Peter, or lower-class characters, she cannot be sent to search for a better life or to make her fortune in the British Empire. As a genteel single lady, Miss Matty is left without an option: she can only enjoy the fruits of the Empire indirectly.

If every act of incorporation is an act of assimilation of the other, both literally and figuratively, then tea in *Cranford* could be considered a threat to the characters’ identity. With every sip of tea, the consumer in the Cranford society swallows a bit of the East yet despite the tea canisters with the mystical writings, the origins of the substance are obscured and it is part of the normal Englishness; it is a substance that is accepted as becoming a part of the self. The idea that an average person would not have known, or have been interested in, the origins of tea is reflected in the narrative of *Cranford* where the subject never comes up and where it is only its part in the commercial transactions Miss Matty is forced to perform that threaten her social identity as a member of the Cranford society.

[431] Maeve Adams.

Food and Sympathy: "A present of bread-jelly"

According to Margaret Croskery the whole narrative of *Cranford* is characterised by sympathy: the sympathetic stance of the novelist is reflected in the narrator's growing sympathy towards the characters and the incidents she describes.[432] Croskery further argues that this stance is finally a part of the reading experience: "the reader resonates sympathetically" with the narrative and the characters.[433] It is debatable whether sympathy has a role in the reading experience, but it has a role in the narrative where it defines social relationships, as well as identities, and where it is expressed both in material gifts and sympathetic gestures. In fact, Jill Rappaport argues that there is a kind of "sympathetic gift economy" in operation in *Cranford* which is not based purely on the exchange of commodities but largely on sisterly support. As she further contends, this economy concerns mainly the group that forms the core society the identity of which it serves to enforce by circulating the sympathetic exchange within the group; it works according to a "principle of conservation", that is, any act of giving or sympathy remains within the group so that the quantity remains invariable.[434] The exchange of friendly gestures of the Cranford ladies' and their "real tender offices to each other whenever they are in distress" (C 5) would thus move in cycles from one member of the group to another.

The circular nature of sympathetic exchange in *Cranford* is not limited to sympathy flowing forth and back within the circle of the 'ladies' of Cranford but it extends outside it and as Rappaport points out, giving is often rewarded with a counter-gift in some form.[435] Gifts of food are a generally accepted way of showing sympathy and appreciation in *Cranford*. The invalid daughter of Captain Brown is the object of

[432] Croskery, 210.
[433] Croskery, 216.
[434] Jill Rappaport, "Conservation of Sympathy in *Cranford*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36 (2008) 95-96.
[435] Jill Rappaport, 98.

pity and sympathy for the inhabitants of Cranford, and the sympathy is expressed by gifts of food: “I don’t suppose anyone has a better dinner than usual cooked, but the best part of all comes in a little covered basin for my sister. The poor people will leave their earliest vegetables at our door for her. They speak short and gruff, as if they were ashamed of it; but I am sure it often goes to my heart to see their thoughtfulness” (C 21). The gifts of food that the poor people give to Miss Brown can be seen as reciprocating “the Captain’s infinite kindness” (C 16) to everyone, including the poor people. He helps a poor old woman, “carrying her baked mutton and potatoes safely home” (C 16) from the bakehouse when the roads are too slippery for her to manage by herself. The fact that the ladies deem this behaviour “eccentric” and against “the Cranford sense of propriety” (C 16) implies that by showing sympathy for the poor woman in such a public manner Captain Brown is jeopardising the amount of sympathetic energy conserved within the group of which he has become accepted as a member; despite being a man and a newcomer he has gained “an extraordinary place as an authority among the Cranford ladies” (C 9). On the other hand, Miss Matty’s kindness as well as her habit of being generous when measuring the tea she sells is reciprocated by the gifts of food she receives from her customers: “If she gave them good weight, they, in their turn, brought many a country present to the ‘old rector’s daughter’; a cream cheese, a few new-laid eggs, a little fresh ripe fruit” (C 174). This reciprocity is not based solely on exchange of sympathetic gestures but is rather economic by nature: the customers pay slightly less for their tea and Miss Matty receives a supplement to her provisions.

Gift giving is thus not limited within the group of ladies but extends outside their immediate circle. When Samuel Brown, aka the conjurer Signor Brunoni, is ill and

recovering from an accident he becomes the object of sympathetic gestures some of which are edible in nature and valued very highly:

> Mrs Forrester made some of the bread-jelly, for which she was so famous, to have ready as a refreshment in the lodgings when he should arrive. A present of this bread-jelly was the highest mark of favour dear Mrs Forrester could confer. … And a mould of this admirable, digestible, unique bread-jelly was sent by Mrs Forrester to our poor sick conjurer. Who says that the aristocracy are proud? (C 124)

The food is something Mrs Forrester is "famous" for which implies that it is not appreciated by the donor only but the community as a whole. The fact that the gift of food has social if not monetary prestige within the community emphasises its value although its significance is more symbolic than financial. The gift of food also expresses the power relations between Mrs Forrester and Samuel Brown; as the donor she occupies the position of strength, socially and temporarily even physically. As a male he has more physical strength than she has; however, in a state of illness he is physically inferior. In a sense, his inferior position in their relationship is further indicated by the fact that there is no apparent reciprocity: he is left in the debt of gratitude, a fact that gives her power over him. Nevertheless, it can be argued that he does give something back, not directly to Mrs Forrester, but it is his wife's account of her experiences in India that leads to the return of Miss Matty's brother, which gives her more material wealth. On the other hand, the other ladies' wish not to hurt "the feelings of delicate independence existing in the mind of every refined female" (C 161) and to conceal the monetary help they plan to give to Miss Matty when she is left basically without income after the bank fails can be seen as an attempt to avoid expressing the hierarchical donor/receiver relationship. The "refined female" can be read as referring not only to Miss Matty but also to the donors of the gift. According to Adam Smith

sympathy is a process where one imagines being in the same situation oneself and "become[s] in some measure the same person with" the other,[436] in other words, sympathy can be seen as requiring identification to a certain degree with the object of sympathy. Thus the sympathy the ladies express with their gift of money can also be seen as an expression of identification with Miss Matty and "every refined female" and of the fear of being in the same situation.[437]

Mrs Forrester's gifts of food also represent the brood-care behaviour that Berking discusses; they reflect her and the whole community's wish to bond with Samuel Brown but they also emphasise the hierarchical nature of the bond. Although the concern for him and the gifts of food he receives can be seen as expressing "the communal relief"[438] when the imagined crime wave disappears with the disappearance of Signor Brunoni, the "dainty dishes" (C 124) Mrs Forrester prepares for him are also a manifestation of the "kindness (somewhat dictatorial) to the poor" (C 5) that the ladies of Cranford practise. The main female characters might not have real economic power yet they do have social power and a certain social status which obliges them "to give without taking".[439] Giving food or feeding someone and the way it is done can be an expression of social hierarchy but also of social relations. When "the lame shoemaker" (C 141) and local postman Thomas delivers the post on special days such as Christmas Day, a task usually performed by his wife, his appearance gives reason for hospitality in

[436] Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 12.
[437] This could, of course, be considered as empathy rather than sympathy. However, as Brigid Lowe points out, it was only at the beginning of the twentieth century when empathy and sympathy became separate terms, empathy taking "over much of the earlier meaning of sympathy" She further notes that "[t]he two words are now often opposed to one another, with 'empathy' comprehending feeling with another person from their point of view, the feeling of their feelings, and 'sympathy' indicating a feeling for them from a distinct, outside, or at least still separate, perspective" (Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: An Alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, London: Anthem Press, 2007, 9). Suzanne Keen points out that empathy corresponds with the idea "I feel what you feel" whereas sympathy is about how we feel "*for* another" (Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 5, italics original).
[438] Jill Rappaport, 96.
[439] Berking, 38.

the houses on his round to the extent that he is "welly stawed wi' eating" (C 140) at the end of his round, meaning that he has eaten almost too much. When he reaches the Jenkyns's household he is given dinner with "Miss Jenkyns standing over him like a bold dragoon"(C 140) to see that he eats it all, giving "an injunction with every mouthful" (C 141). In a way he is force-fed with both literal and metaphorical food; he is "scolded if he did not leave a clean plate, however heaped it might have been" (C 141). With the food he is also forced to swallow the advice Miss Jenkyns is giving, for the "ceremony" of the occasional dinner offered to Thomas is "regarded by Miss Jenkyns as a glorious opportunity for giving advice and benefiting her fellow creatures" (C 141). Miss Jenkyns's patronising attitude towards Thomas is an expression of her concept of their respective social roles and positions: she gives and he receives. There are no expectations of reciprocity other than his at least seemingly pliant attitude to her interference with his life, interference which gets Malthusian tones when Miss Jenkyns is described as "upbraiding him if another [child] was likely to make its appearance" in the family (C 141).[440]

A gift of food is not easily realisable in order to get financial advantage from it, or as Fennell states, it is basically "illiquid"[441], and the illiquidity of the gift of food Thomas receives in the Jenkyns house is ensured by Miss Jenkyns who stands over him like a soldier guarding a prisoner and seeing that he consumes the gift there and then. When she dies, the task is left to her sister Matty to perform; she is less dictatorial and bold and feels "rather shy over the ceremony" (C 141). She is also less particular about making sure that Thomas eats all the food immediately and is even described as witnessing him packing the food to go: she "winked at its rapid disappearance into a blue cotton pocket-handkerchief" (C 141). A gift of money appears to be less illiquid

[440] For a discussion on Malthus's theories and *Cranford* see Lisa Niles, "Malthusian Menopause: Ageing and Sexuality in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33 (2005): 293-310.
[441] Fennell, 91.

than a gift of food yet it is often socially labelled as being illiquid; it is usually designated to be used for something special rather than daily commodities. When Thomas has finished his dinner Miss Jenkyns gives him gifts of money, accompanied with instructions as to the receiver: "Miss Jenkyns gave him each individual coin separate, with a 'There! That's for yourself; that's for Jenny,' etc." (C 141). By specifying the recipients, also the children who all get a "shilling and the mince-pie" (C 141), she is earmarking the money; this implies that it is to be used individually and it is a gift rather than charity. In some ways, Miss Jenkyns's careful specification of the recipients can be seen as an expression of goodwill which serves as a kind of a gift wrapping and thus labels the money as a gift.

The symbolic value of Mrs Forrester's gift of bread-jelly is increased by the fact that the recipe itself is highly esteemed. Not only is giving a gift of the jelly "a highest mark of favour" (C 124) but so is sharing the recipe itself:

> Miss Pole had once asked her for the receipt, but she had met with a very decided rebuff; that lady told her that she could not part with it to anyone during her life, and that after her death it was bequeathed, as her executors would find, to Miss Matty. What Miss Matty … might choose to do with the receipt when it came into her possession – whether to make it public, or to hand it down as an heirloom – she did not know, nor would she dictate. (C 124)

If circulating recipes among women was part of creating a community as well as "a heritage of tradition and rituals" as Andrea K. Newlyn argues,[442] then Mrs Forrester's refusal to share the recipe undermines the idea of a female community. Nevertheless, in a community comprised by women with limited pecuniary means where money or articles of monetary worth are not necessarily available to be given as gifts or bequests, recipes become heirlooms with a difference. The elevation of a recipe for bread-jelly to

[442] Andrea K. Newlyn, "Redefining 'Rudimentary' Narrative: Women's Nineteenth-Century Manuscript Cookbooks," *The Recipe Reader: Narratives, Contexts, Traditions*, eds. Janet Floyd and Laurel Forster (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010) 43.

an article mentioned in a will reflects the centrality of domesticity and domestic female economy in Cranford. Moreover, the recipe can be seen as one of the "personal effects" women more than men left to their friends and relatives in their will, a fact that Davidoff and Hall see as an indication of the "more personal nature of [women's] property".[443] Nevertheless, as Audrey Jaffe points out, despite professing self-sufficiency, the Cranford society is, if not completely, at least in many ways dependent on the masculine economics.[444] Thus in a narrative where money and possessions gained through the male economy often fail and leave the female characters in straitened circumstances, as when banks fail, husbands die or never materialise, and where inheritance laws treat women unfairly, a coveted recipe for food represents something that women can own and pass on to other women as they wish regardless of the fluctuations in the male economy.

Conclusions

Rather than validating the assessments according to which female hunger was absent in nineteenth-century middle-class culture and nineteenth-century fiction, *Cranford* contests it for hunger is very much present in the novel. The need to camouflage their hunger defines the central characters economically, although their economic distress is indirectly due to their gender. The characters seek to preserve the coherence of their society and hide financial limitations by adhering to rules of food consumption which restrict the amount of food served when entertaining guests. Their hunger and their appetite are nevertheless articulated both in words and in action, and when food is offered it is also relished. Regulating food consumption in the novel is a means to control not only individual but also collective identities and define their boundaries.

[443] Davidoff and Hall, 276.
[444] Audrey Jaffe, "*Cranford* and *Ruth*," *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill L. Matus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 51.

Food and drink are seen as potential threats to cultural and social identities in the novel. The way oranges and peas are or should be consumed articulates identities and transitions: table manners and consumption of individual articles of food reflect social class and the possession of cultural capital but they also record changes in how civilised and uncivilised are defined. A psychoanalytic reading of Miss Jenkyns's insistence that oranges should be eaten privately to avoid vocal and visual connotations of breastfeeding shows that it expresses the identity of a genteel middle-class lady and the wish to identify with the paternal; the difficulties that Mr Holborn's female guests experience in trying to avoid eating peas with the knife articulates their social position. Tea has a varied role in the novel: it is the quintessential English ingredient of a successful social gathering, albeit often subservient to playing cards. It is also a foreign commodity and commercial goods deemed genteel enough to be sold by Miss Matty after she loses her income. Unlike French food which she views with suspicion, tea, despite its foreign provenance, represents a familiar domestic substance for Miss Matty, something she can consume and sell without endangering her concept of self.

Giving and reciprocating gifts of food is a key element in the defining of the socio-economic relations in Cranford; gifts of food are always reciprocated directly or indirectly in one form or another, whether with another gift of food or by doing a service: the return of Miss Matty's long-lost brother Peter is the indirect result of the Cranford ladies gifts of food and care to an itinerant conjurer. Gifts of food express the inner hierarchies and social boundaries of the Cranford community as a whole, to be able to give without expecting a counter gift is an indication of social power. In *Cranford*, gifts, like the meals the characters provide for their guests, thus define social identities but it is *Wives and Daughters*, the topic of the following chapter, which

presents fully fledged social aspirants and skilful constructors of social images who seek to define and redefine social boundaries and identities through food and meals.

7. *Wives and Daughters*

Social Images: "Cheese is only fit for the kitchen"

Pierre Bourdieu points out that a meal served to guests is part of a complex network of economic and social determinants that define the hosts' social and economic position and that "the style of meal people like to offer is no doubt a very good indicator of the image they wish to give or avoid giving to others."[445] Hence a meal that one is able to offer to one's guests would be an indicator of a certain character as well as of a certain financial and social situation but also a means to manipulate one's image in the eyes of the others. In *Wives and Daughters*, Mr Gibson, the Hollingford doctor, is described as facing a situation in which a meal and the whole setting of it convey an unwanted image of him and the whole household. When offering an impromptu meal to Lord Hollingford, the local aristocrat, Mr Gibson feels a certain kind of inferiority, not so much because of the simple meal of "bread-and-cheese, cold beef, or the simplest food available" (WD 101) the visitor is willing to consume but more because of

> the want of nicety – almost the want of cleanliness, in all its accompaniment – dingy plate, dull-looking glass, a tablecloth that, if not absolutely dirty, was anything but fresh in its splashed and rumpled condition… [which he] compared … in his own mind with the dainty delicacy with which even a loaf of brown bread was served up at his guest's house. (WD 101)

Although the utensils and the linen are not exactly dirty, this is the impression the table setting gives. Douglas notes that in some cultures avoiding dirt is a matter of religion but in the Western world dirt "is a matter of aesthetics, hygiene or etiquette, which only

[445] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 79.

becomes grave in so far as it may create social embarrassment."[446] The dingy plates and the splashed table-cloth become a matter of social embarrassment because they convey an image of ignorance of or indifference to matters of aesthetic sensibilities and the requirements of etiquette. Although "the comfortless meal" (WD 101) is fundamentally a reflection of the incompetence and slovenliness of the servants, in the eyes of the guest it reflects an image of the host, to whom the properties transfer. Thus it is the host whose character is jeopardised; the "social sanctions" such as "contempt" that Douglas notes as a result of a breach of social conventions like etiquette in the matter of uncleanliness[447] would be used against him. Mr Gibson makes excuses for the shortcomings of the household by referring to the fact that not only is his daughter away but more importantly he is a widow and does not have a wife to manage the household. It is actually partly the shame of not being able to entertain according to his desire or to his social and economic position that leads him to a second marriage.

The state of Mr Gibson's household is contrasted with that of another wifeless man, the Cumnor's land-agent Mr Preston who resides in one of the Cumnors' houses. When he is to host Mr and Mrs Gibson's wedding breakfast, he also accommodates Mr Gibson and Molly for the preceding night and gives them dinner. Mr Preston does his best to impress his guests with the setting of the dinner with "snowy table-linen, bright silver, clear sparkling glass, wine and autumnal dessert on the sideboard" (WD 154). Compared to the dismal state of Mr Gibson's lunch table, Mr Preston's dinner table epitomises cleanliness, as well as aesthetic sensibilities. The pristine condition of the whole table setting reflects not only light but also the competence and hard work of the servants and gives "the impression of good housekeeping".[448] To a certain extent, the

[446] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 92.
[447] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 92.
[448] Davidoff and Hall, 381. They point out that "[t]he gleam of silver (or plate) on polished wood gave the impression of good housekeeping, evoking the time and energy spent rubbing with beeswax" (381).

glory of the good housekeeping is reflected to Mr Preston whose social image as a man who has taste and is fully aware of the etiquette of dining, it enhances. Nevertheless, Mr Preston is not the actual master of the house but only another employee of the Cumnors and therefore the whole setting reflects more the "dainty delicacy" (WD 101) of the aristocratic Cumnors than Mr Preston. The awareness of the fact partly explains his eager attempts to 'own' the household by constantly referring to his "bachelor's housekeeping" (WD 155).

His efforts to impress the guests are accentuated by his constant apologies to Molly "for the rudeness of his bachelor home" (WD 154) which nevertheless draw attention to the fact that his home and his dinner table are far from simple and rough. His apologies are a sophisticated way of begging a compliment from Molly who is however too unsophisticated to realise this; when she involuntarily remarks that the house is "very pleasant" (WD 155) she is annoyed by the fact that "Mr Preston seemed to take it as a compliment to himself" (WD 155). At the dinner he continues the references to his status as a bachelor and manages to annoy Molly even more:

> Molly thought everything that was served was delicious, and cooked to the point of perfection; but they did not seem to satisfy Mr Preston, who apologized to his guests several times for the bad cooking of this dish, or the omission of a particular sauce to that; always referring to bachelor's housekeeping, bachelor's this and bachelor's that, till Molly grew quite impatient at the word. (WD 155).

By denigrating the dinner he serves to his guests and by constantly drawing attention to the fact that he is a bachelor Mr Preston is constructing an identity and displaying a certain social image of himself to the guests. His criticism of the food served implies a message of culinary knowledge; by judging certain dishes badly made or lacking a vital accompaniment he is claiming to possess knowledge of what is proper when it comes to

dining in style. In this sense he is constructing a character who is capable of appreciating food beyond its nutritional value: his culinary knowledge creates a social image and is a sign of a certain social position. Choices made concerning food and its consumption reflect not only the possessed or acquired knowledge of how to behave in any given circumstances and thus one's cultural capital but also one's taste. Mr Preston's articulation of taste through his commentary on food reveals the way he classifies himself as well as his idea of how others, in this case Molly and her father, should classify him. Molly's obvious satisfaction with the food, expressed by the narrator, is contrasted with Mr Preston's dissatisfaction with it; the contrast implies a difference between the two characters: Mr Preston's seeming sophistication in matters of dining and entertaining comes close to being affectation and is contrasted with the artless and more sincere character of Molly.

The life of the local aristocratic Cumnor family manifests both their pecuniary strength and their social status; they are "the local fount of prestige, the pinnacle of county society confirmed by rank and wealth."[449] Their food consumption enforces their social image: "the tiny meal of exquisitely cooked delicacies, sent up on old Chelsea china, that was served every day to the earl and countess" (WD 98) is a symbol of their position as prominent members of the leisure class and their freedom from labour. For the former governess of the Cumnor family, Mrs Kirkpatrick, later Mrs Gibson, the Cumnors' food consumption symbolises the idealised lifestyle she aspires to. Her aspirations lead her to contemplate a second marriage which would enable her to achieve a more genteel lifestyle than what she can achieve by keeping a school and "toiling and moiling for money": "Marriage is the natural thing; then the husband has all that kind of dirty work to do, and his wife sits in the drawing-room like a lady" (WD

[449] Lansbury, 188.

98). Her marriage to Mr Gibson gives her the financial possibility to more fully engage in emulation and to continue her aspirations for a genteel social image in which meals and their connotations serve a crucial role. Mrs Gibson's consumption behaviour follows the two Veblenesque emulative patterns: she admires the life-style and characteristics of those socially or financially above herself but she also wishes to distinguish herself in the eyes of her peers. Her emulation of the class above, or "aping the manners of the aristocracy" (WD 236) as the narrator puts it, does not remain at the level of a wish to adopt their lifestyle but it expresses the wish to be considered as genteel as they are. Her partly assumed intimacy with the Cumnors is not only social emulation in the sense that she aspires to the level of them. It is also meant to give her social esteem so that by socialising with the upper class she acquires a certain social image herself: "[S]he was quite aware of the prestige which her being able to say she had been staying with 'dear Lady Cumnor' at the Towers, was likely to give her … in the eyes of a good many people" (WD 96).

Veblen argues that the so-called scholarly classes, such as governesses, are especially vulnerable to pecuniary emulation and conspicuous consumption. He notes that because they often socialise with a class wealthier than themselves, and are often considered as belonging to a higher social class than they really belong to, they are expected to consume according to the expectations of the higher class although they usually do not have the necessary wealth to do this. Thus they are often compelled to practise strict economy in private to be able to consume in public.[450] When preparing her trousseau before her marriage to Mr Gibson, Mrs Gibson decides to spend money on things that would enforce her social image: "What new articles she bought for herself, were all such as would make a show, and an impression upon the ladies of Hollingford.

[450] Veblen, 87.

She argued with herself that linen, and all underclothing, would never be seen; while she knew that every gown she had would give rise to much discussion, and would be counted up in the little town" (WD 140).[451] Mrs Gibson engages in a continuous performance of her desired social image and identity not only through clothes but also through the choices she makes when it comes to consuming food. When her daughter Cynthia's suitor is coming for a visit from London with the intention of proposing to her, Mrs Gibson's foremost thought is how to give the best possible image of the family and their position; she is "intent on the lunch which should impress Mr Henderson at once with an idea of family refinement" (WD 598). Although the family's financial position is secure, they are not rich, and this fact somewhat limits the character's aspirations to "keep an elegant table" (WD 597) to the extent that she needs to pay attention to the cost of provisions.

The planning and execution of a meal provided for Lady Harriet, the daughter of the Cumnor family, is an operation resembling a stage production. The message concerning Lady Harriet's prospective visit gives Mrs Gibson a reason to speculate whether the guest will stay for lunch. This speculation sets into motion the planning of the setting, the meal, and even the performers. The wish to have all the glory of the aristocratic visit all to herself makes her send her stepdaughter Molly on an errand. She consents to her daughter Cynthia staying because with her help she will be able to realise the ideal meal and thus the ideal character of the household:

> you might stay here in the dining-room, you know, so as to be ready to arrange lunch prettily, if she does take a fancy to stay for it. … I

[451] Mary Waters argues that Mrs Gibson's choice of purchasing goods for the show value rather than for their usefulness or necessity is an indication of her shallowness and of her being "[c]oncerned with appearance rather than quality" (15-16). Nevertheless, Mrs Gibson's choice is not really between appearance and quality but between visible and invisible. The fact that she chooses not to spend money on underclothing does not necessarily indicate that she is not interested in the quality of her purchases but that she is more interested in making an impression and in the image she provides.

> would not like her to think we made any difference in our meals because she stayed. "Simple elegance," as I tell her, "always is what we aim at." But still you could put out the best service, and arrange some flowers, and ask cook what there is for dinner that she could send us for lunch, and make it all look pretty, and impromptu, and natural. (WD 356)

The desire to give a certain image of the household consumption pattern is shown to require much planning as well as adjusting the normal course of the household proceedings. To achieve 'simple' elegance is anything but simple for it requires careful planning which indicates the distance from the genteel lifestyle and identity Mrs Gibson wishes to embody. She attempts to construct her social image by producing a meal which would give Lady Harriet an impression of both individual and social refinement. When Lady Harriet asks if she could stay and have something to eat with the family she is uncertain how to call the family's midday meal: "Can you give me some lunch Clare? … I only want a little bread and butter, and perhaps a slice of cold meat … perhaps you dine now?" (WD 359). By voicing the wish to have something to eat Lady Harriet sets into motion the machinery that is intended to create the impression of a household that conforms to the rules of upper-class eating patterns. When Mrs Gibson rings the bell to have more coals brought in, the sound also serves as a signal to Cynthia who heads the operation behind the scenes: "The brace of partridges that were to have been for the late dinner were instantly put down to the fire; and the prettiest china put out, and the table decked with flowers and fruit" (WD 360). Decorating the table so that it is aesthetically pleasing puts an emphasis not only on the actual food offered but also on form, a fact that reflects Mrs Gibson's social aspirations. The table nevertheless also reflects Cynthia's "taste" (WD 360) and if one agrees with Bourdieu's definition of taste being something that transmutes "things into distinct and distinctive signs"[452] then her taste

[452] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 174.

has changed the table into a sign of a certain kind of lifestyle and social position. Mrs Gibson's performance is successful, for Lady Harriet leaves the house with the impression that her former governess "had done very well for herself" (WD 360).

What a meal is called and when it is served is an issue of social class in *Wives and Daughters* especially for Mrs Gibson who realises the power of correct terminology. Thus when she enters the Gibson household her new domestic arrangements include the changing of the meal times and their names: the one o'clock dinner becomes a lunch and dinner is moved to six o'clock. The arrangements are an inconvenience for most of the other members of the household: the cook does "not like the trouble of late dinners" (WD 178) and leaves and Mr Gibson "felt as if he should never be able to arrange his rounds aright with this new-fangled notion of a six o'clock dinner" (WD 177). The word 'new-fangled' implies reluctance on the part of Mr Gibson to accept changes he sees as unnecessary and even objectionable. Mrs Gibson's contrasting eagerness to embrace the new-fangled ideas about meal times is influenced by her propensity to social emulation. When in doubt as to how to properly call the meal she intends to share with Mrs Gibson, Lady Harriet is in doubt about the social and financial position of the family. Her uncertainty also indicates the differences in meal times and their designation in the nineteenth century. The upper-class midday meal was called lunch but how the rest of the population called it was less unequivocal; for the working classes it was still dinner but especially for the socially ambitious and fashion-conscious middle classes it became lunch. Veblen argues that changes in the habits of consumption are influenced by both social and geographical distance; changes occur slower and later among social groups who have less contact with the fashionable upper

class or who live in places where there is less "mobility of the population" and where new ideas would thus not reach very easily.[453]

Expressing an ideal social identity can nevertheless prove challenging when there is a need to convince the fashionable society of one's right to belong to it. When having lunch with the aristocratic Cumnors and their ducal visitors, Mrs Gibson keeps creating and realising her ideal social identity by controlling her food consumption. Her refusal to consume food at the lunch is an attempt to emphasise her and her husband's social distinction by a reference to their eating hours: "At lunch Mrs Gibson was secretly hurt by my lord's supposing it to be her dinner, and calling out his urgent hospitality from the very bottom of the table, giving as a reason for it, that she must remember it was her dinner" (WD 275). When Lord Cumnor hospitably urges Mrs Gibson to fill her stomach at the lunch for the reason that it would be her dinner and thus the main meal of the day he is acknowledging not only a difference between different meal times but also between social classes, and thus a difference between the middle-class Gibsons and the aristocratic Cumnors.

The fact that the society of Hollingford at large is depicted as holding on to the traditional custom of dining early and drinking tea at six is an indication of its distance from "the radiant body"[454] as well as from the birthplace of trends. The discrepancy between the dining hours in Hollingford serves as a metaphor for social division within the community for Mrs Gibson's insistence on emulating the consumption patterns of the fashionable upper-class society prevents her complete integration into the middle-class Hollingford. The late dinners prevent invitations to "the small tea-drinkings" (WD 440), which are the primary manner of socialising in Hollingford: "How ask people to tea at six, who dined at that hour? How, when they refused cake and sandwiches at half-

[453] Veblen, 80-81.
[454] Veblen, 81.

past eight, how induce other people who were really hungry to commit a vulgarity before those calm and scornful eyes" (WD 440). The "lull of invitations for the Gibsons to Hollingford tea-parties" (WD 440) does not bother Mrs Gibson who is depicted as being far from unhappy about the situation; for her the Hollingford tea-parties are small "festivities" (WD 440) that she is happy to miss in her quest for socially more significant company. Her social aspirations lead her into another direction for her "object was to squeeze herself into 'county society'" (WD 440) and thus being left out from the less fashionable, and therefore in Mrs Gibson's view less genteel, circles of Hollingford tea-drinking society does not bother her. As Lawrence notes, although changing the time of dinner seems a minor issue yet it could affect one's social life and either "shrink or enlarge a social circle".[455]

To follow certain dinner procedures, even when not entertaining guests, is to pay allegiance to a certain class spirit. Mrs Gibson's connections to the aristocratic Cumnors gains her a reputation in Hollingford; some of the other characters consider her to be "quite the lady herself; dines late, … everything in style" (WD 502). Her insistence on dining 'in style' also means that she strictly adheres to the proper forms of dining even when she dines alone with her step-daughter Molly: the dinner "took up at least an hour; for it was one of Mrs Gibson's fancies – one which Molly chafed against – to have every ceremonial gone through in the same stately manner for two as for twenty" (WD 497). The rule of following the full forms of dining includes the presence of dessert even when none of the diners will eat it. When dining alone with Molly, Mrs Gibson insists on dessert being set on the table although everybody knows it will be left uneaten:

[455] Lawrence, 32.

> although Molly knew full well, and her stepmother knew full well, and Maria [the maid] knew full well, that neither Mrs Gibson nor Molly touched dessert, it was set on the table with as much form as if Cynthia had been at home, who delighted in almonds and raisins; or Mr Gibson been there, who never could resist dates, although he always protested against 'persons in their station of life having a formal dessert set out before them every day.' (WD 497-8)

In the absence of anyone who would actually consume and enjoy the dessert its function becomes symbolic. It is a sign of genteel lifestyle, a lifestyle that Mrs Gibson aspires to but her husband does not. Mr Gibson's idea of the family's social rank differs from that of his new wife who defends the presence of a formal dessert even when no one eats it: "'It's no extravagance, for we need not eat it – I never do. But it looks well, and makes Maria understand what is required in the daily life of every family of position.'" (WD 498). Keeping up appearances, or putting on "a genteel charade", on purpose to give the world an idealised picture of a family's consuming power was a relatively usual occurrence among the image conscious Victorian middle class;[456] dessert is a relatively inexpensive way to keep up appearances yet it helps to construct the sought-after social image.

When Molly's father and his new wife are on their honeymoon, Molly stays with the Browning sisters where she is visited by Lady Harriet, who has taken a liking to the straightforward Molly. Molly has reproached Lady Harriet for her way of referring to the Hollingford people, including the Browning sisters who she has nicknamed Pecksy and Flapsy, as if they were "a kind of strange animal" (WD 161) yet as Lady Harriet points out this is how most people speak about the class they themselves do not belong to.[457] Molly consents to Lady Harriet's plans to visit her at the Miss Brownings' when she promises "to be respectful to them in word and in deed –

[456] Attar, 137.
[457] Pecksy and Flapsy were the names of two girl robins in a book about robins, first published in late eighteenth century and still popular in the early nineteenth century.

and in very thought" (WD 164). When she finally does pay the visit, Molly is away and when one of the sisters recounts the visit, she makes a point of repeating a discussion on tea and tea prices they have had with their aristocratic visitor:

> And she was quite struck with our tea, and asked where we got it, for she had never tasted any like it before; and I told her we gave only 3*s*. 4*d*. a pound for it, at Johnson's – sister says I ought to have told her the price of our company-tea, which is 5*s*. a pound, only that was not what we were drinking; for as ill-luck would have it, we'd none of it in the house – and she said she would send us some of hers, all the way from Russia or Prussia, or some out-of-the-way place, and we were to compare and see which we liked best; and if we liked hers best, she could get it for us at 3*s*. a pound. (WD 170-1) [458]

The comparison of tastes and prices, and sorts of tea, is a certain kind of 'rivalry' but also a way to bond, for tea serves as a means to unite the aristocratic guest and the middle-class hosts, like two species of animal, by providing a common interest and a common ground on which to operate. That consumption is a way to distinguish oneself, and a locus of snobbery as well, is clear from the regret that the price of the tea served is not the price the older sister would have preferred to quote. By confessing that the tea served is a cheaper sort from the local grocer's and not the obviously more prestigious East India Company tea, the younger sister inadvertently situates them on a lower level of consuming hierarchy than the other sister would want to admit to; it conveys an unwanted social image of them for drinking a more expensive sort of tea would distinguish the sisters socially, as well as financially. On the other hand, the tea that Lady Harriet recommends expresses a certain social image; the tea that comes "from Russia or Prussia, or some out-of-the-way place" (WD 171) probably refers to tea called Russian Caravan, a blend of Chinese teas, which was transported from Asia to Europe

[458] Burnett states that "[i]n 1813 the cheapest tea sold by Twinings cost 4s 10d a pound, and Congou, the sort more often used by the working classes, was 5s 6d." Due to the decrease in tax, in 1859 "Congou was now 3s 2d a pound" (*Liquid Pleasures*, 58). Unless the middle-class Browning sisters and the upper-class Lady Harriet are meant to have preference for tea of the cheapest sort, it is safe to assume that the prices quoted in the scene are those prevalent after the tax reduction of the 1850s.

via Russia in camel caravans and which has a smoky flavour attributed to the caravan campfires. In 1839, Sigmond notes that "the Caravan tea of Russia … [is] in all respects superior in point of taste and flavour" to teas usually consumed in England.[459]

When Mrs Gibson, to whom a meal is never really just about food and who considers a dinner a good opportunity to introduce her daughter to prospective husbands, suggests that they should invite the squire Hamley's sons to dine, Mr Gibson has some reservations about the plan: "these young Cambridge men have a very good taste in wine, and don't spare it. My cellar won't stand many of their attacks" (WD 242-3). When Mrs Gibson accuses him of lack of hospitality he professes that if the invitation would indicate that only "bitter beer" (WD 243) would be offered then they could entertain the brothers as often as possible. His reference to "young Cambridge men" can be understood not only as referring to the Hamley brothers, both educated at Cambridge, but also to young men from a certain social group, that is, young men with a specific social and pecuniary background; since at least until the mid-nineteenth century university education was the prerogative of upper-class males, these connoisseurs of wine could have been classified as such. Thus the tendency to appreciate good wine, to have "good taste in wine", would be a given class characteristics and indication of a certain kind of lifestyle as well as possession of a certain cultural capital.

Nevertheless, although it can be argued that in Victorian England wine and especially spirits were gendered beverages, it is more difficult to argue, for example, that to appreciate good wine or to consume wine were upper-class privileges. The Cumnors' former land-agent, Mr Sheepshanks, who regularly declines the invitations to tea and the subsequent supper the ladies of Hollingford keep sending him, "was not

[459] Sigmond, 45-6.

unwilling to give dinners to three or four chosen friends and familiars, with whom, in return, he dined from time to time, and with whom, also, he kept up an amicable rivalry in the matter of wines" (WD 343). One reason for his refusal to attend the Hollingford parties is wine, or rather the lack of proper wine available: "He remembered the made-wines he had tasted in former days at Hollingford parties, and shuddered" (WD 343-4). The "amicable rivalry" among his circle of friends when it comes to wines is an indication of knowledge of wines; knowledge implies taste and the ability to spend time and money on cultivating that taste, which according to Veblen imply a certain social position.[460] Knowledge of wines connotes a certain lifestyle of which taste, according to Bourdieu, is a manifestation, and consequently a certain social image. If one considers drinking wine as one of the "objectively classified practices"[461] then taste and especially its expression, that is, the ability to engage in rivalry concerning wine, transforms its consumption into a classifying practice; it classifies the drinkers and becomes a symbol of a certain social position. As a land agent and thus a kind of business manager to the Cumnor estate Mr Sheepshanks's class position, like Mr Preston's, can be seen as ambiguous yet as John Robinson argues, in the nineteenth-century a land agent of a large estate was often "a considerable personage in his own right, often living in style."[462] The friendly rivalry between the characters expresses a certain lifestyle and even emulation of the lifestyle of their social superiors yet it is less about social emulation than it is about pecuniary emulation, that is, the characters try to outdo each other.

When the new land agent, Mr Preston, moves to Hollingford and accepts all the invitations to parties "made in his honour" (WD 344) the elder Mr Sheepshanks suspects he has an ulterior motive for his acceptance. As the narrator points out, Mr

[460] Veblen, 64.
[461] Bourdieu, 175.
[462] John Martin Robinson, *The English Country Estate* (London: Century, 1988) 165.

Sheepshanks is right because for Mr Preston the Hollingford parties provide an opportunity not only to make him popular among the Hollingford society but also to pursue Molly's new step-sister Cynthia with whom he is in love. Despite his initial popularity among the Hollingford ladies Mr Preston's reputation begins to change, he is whispered to be a womaniser and a gambler, and is rumoured to have sometimes "taken too much wine" (WD 444). For the younger of the Browning sisters this last fact is the most shocking for like many members of the nineteenth-century middle classes she also makes a direct connection between taking too much wine and being a drunkard: "Taken too much wine. Oh, sister, is he a drunkard? And we have had him to tea!" (WD 444). Gwen Hyman notes that in the nineteenth century drunkenness was associated with immorality and depravity[463] and the younger Miss Browning's worry about having a drunkard and thus a morally depraved person in their house expresses her fear of being associated with such a person. Nevertheless, the older Miss Browning dismisses her sister's fears by noting that drinking too much is quasi-normal behaviour for males: "A man may take too much wine occasionally, without being a drunkard. Don't let me hear you using such coarse words, Phoebe!" (WD 444). Being a drunkard was to be vulgar but so was having such a word in one's vocabulary.

In the narrative, meals and wine are used to create and recreate social images and social identities but the article of food which Mrs Gibson sees as detrimental to the social image of Mr Gibson and consequently of the whole family is cheese. When being questioned about her father's likes and dislikes by her step-mother, Molly Gibson reveals that her father "doesn't care what he has, if it's only ready. He would take bread-and-cheese, if cook would only send it in instead of dinner" (WD 127). This implies an attitude to food that emphasises the nutritional dimension of food: food

[463] Gwen Hyman, "'An Infernal Fire in My Veins': Gentlemanly Drinking in the *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36.2 (2008) 452.

appeases hunger and fills the stomach after "a long ride" (WD 127) to see patients and prepares for another. For Mrs Gibson, on the other hand, there is a direct link between an individual's consumption practices and his or her social identity: for her food has first and foremost symbolic dimension. Thus cheese, for example, is not just food, but a symbol of vulgarity: "we must change all that. I shouldn't like to think of your father eating cheese; it's such a strong-smelling, coarse kind of thing.… Cheese is only fit for the kitchen" (WD 128). Sarah Freeman points out that cheese was not favoured by the nineteenth-century "polite society" because it was considered difficult to digest and because of its association with the working classes.[464] In *Cranford*, when Lady Glenmire's engagement to the local surgeon is announced, to the horror of the Cranford ladies, the discrepancy between the future spouses' social position is expressed in the prediction that she will have "to come down to many a want of refinement" (C 135), an example of which is the fact that her future husband "sups on bread-and-cheese and beer every night" (C 135). Cheese thus had a social image and although often part of a standard middle-class dinner menu it was not supposed to be used to appease hunger or to be eaten in large quantities but was to be served "as an after-dinner stimulant, and in very small quantity."[465] Bread and cheese were the staple food for working-class people, especially when they made up a whole meal, and Isabella Beeton, for example, reminds her readers of the nature and connotations of such food: "Bread and cheese, as a meal, is only fit for soldiers on march or labourers in the open air, who like it because it 'holds the stomach a long time.'"[466] The need to consume food that fills the stomach and keeps hunger away for a long time connotes physical labour and hence a certain

[464] Freeman, 69. A nineteenth-century handbook on diet notes that cheese "is generally very difficult of digestion" but when toasted it is much easier to digest. The writer further states that "[i]t is difficult to over-estimate the effect of cooking in the digestion of the different articles of food" (William Henry Robertson, *A Popular Treatise on Diet and Regimen*, vol.1 (London: John Churchill, 1847, 126-7). Generally speaking, Victorians considered uncooked food, including uncooked vegetables, bad for one's digestion.
[465] Beeton, 817.
[466] Beeton, 817.

social identity. Therefore, when Mr Gibson protests against having "dainties" for his lunch and assures his wife that "bread and cheese is the chief of my diet" (WD 177) he is in Mrs Gibson's view inadvertently implying not only a preference but also an identity; he is endangering his social image: eating cheese places him symbolically at the same level with labourers. For Mrs Gibson there is a certain discrepancy between her husband's genteel leanness and social image and his food consumption preferences: "Really, Mr Gibson, it is astonishing to compare your appearance and manners with your tastes. You look such a gentleman, as dear Lady Cumnor used to say" (WD 178). Mr Gibson's eating preferences do not thus conform to the social image he has or the expected pattern of consumption Mrs Gibson sees suitable for him and his social position; her attempts to "cure him of" (WD 128) eating cheese, a wording that sounds as if eating cheese was an unwanted disease, are "attempts at control over the body, the mind and therefore over identity."[467]

Mrs Gibson's classification of cheese as 'smelly' indicates yet another dimension of food consumption: its odour. Defective cold storage systems and the nature of cheese produced in farmhouses would have actually contributed to the smelliness of cheese in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, it is not only the smell of cheese that threatens the household's gentility but smell of food in general. When changing the one o'clock dinner time for a later and more genteel six o'clock Mrs Gibson is trying to avoid the collision between the early dinner time and the high society's calling rituals: "It was awkward to be carrying hot, savoury-smelling dishes from the kitchen to the dining-room at the very time when high-born ladies, with noses of aristocratic refinement, might be calling" (WD 177). Janice Carlisle argues that

[467] Fischler, 280.

smells can express "economic [and] … social distinctions"[468] and the smell of food is a palpable reminder of not only the act of eating and hence of corporeality but also of cooking. Much like Douglas's idea of dirt being threatening because it is something which is not in the right place, it can be argued that smell of food outside the kitchen, or the dining room, is threatening because it is out of place. According to Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, "[s]egragating the mess and the smell of food preparation from the social ritual of eating became an important hallmark of respectability" for the middle classes in the nineteenth century and therefore the kitchen would ideally be situated as far as possible from the living area.[469] This was not always possible and thus the savoury smells pervading the house would imply certain social and economic circumstances: in the Gibsons' house, for example, the spatial distance between the kitchen and the living area is a short one and the food is carried to the dining room through the living area; the house is thus relatively small especially if compared to aristocratic dwellings were food is "sent up" (WD 98) from the kitchen below. Since architectural changes are not an option, Mrs Gibson tries to remove the threat of smell out of place by attempting to create an illusion of an odourless household. The necessity of eliminating the odours of food from the house at certain times of the day leads into a new way of organising the household midday food consumption: Mr Gibson's pupils are banished to the surgery to consume their food, Mr Gibson has to content himself with "some little dainty" (WD 177) made ready earlier and Mrs Gibson and Molly will have a "few elegant cold trifles… [that] would not scent the house" (WD 177). Mrs Gibson's complaint that "the dining-room is so – so what shall I call it? So dinnery, – the smell of meals never seems to leave it" (WD 476) is an indication of her wish to eliminate the smell of food even from the room dedicated to the act of eating. When

[468] Janice Carlisle, *Common Scents: Comparative Encounters in High-Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 12.
[469] Davidoff and Hall, 383.

wishing not to have odours of food pester the hoped for upper-class visitors she is also wishing not to be associated with the lower-class connotations of such odours. It is thus not only the food one eats but also its smell that affects one's social image.

Ladies and Gentlemen: "A very genteel figure"

The "cold trifles" that would not fill the house with the smell of food also imply the conduct book maxim of the feminine ideal. Michie points out that in the nineteenth century, different bodies, depending on their social class and gender, were "thought to have radically different needs and desires coming out of different bodily configurations."[470] Thus upper- and middle-class ladies were expected to suppress their appetite at least in public and be content with "dainty morsels" but working class women as well as men of all classes could have "hearty appetites".[471] It is partly social pressure that is on display in the scene at the beginning of *Wives and Daughters* when Mrs Gibson, then still Mrs Kirkpatrick, eats with relish the food intended for her future step-daughter Molly. The then ten-year-old Molly is found tired and suffering from a headache in the garden of the Towers on the day of the annual summer festival and a servant is ordered to bring a tray of food for her refreshment. When the tray arrives and she refuses the food because she is feeling ill, it is consumed by her future step-mother into whose care she is left:

> Molly [was] … watching the good appetite with which the lady ate up the chicken and jelly, and drank the glass of wine. She was so pretty and so graceful in her deep mourning, that even her hurry in eating, as if she was afraid of some one coming to surprise her in the act, did not keep her little observer from admiring her in all she did. (WD 17)

[470] Helena Michie, "Under Victorian Skins: The Bodies Beneath," *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) 409.
[471] Attar, 139.

Maureen T. Reddy notes that eating the food intended for the child symbolises the future Mrs Gibson's shortcomings in her role as a mother and a nurturer to her own daughter Cynthia and later to Molly.[472] It is true that Mrs Gibson is represented as having to a certain extent failed in her maternal role, even in the eyes of her own daughter who feels that her mother "never seemed to care to have me with her" (WD 469), leaving her more or less to her own devices, and preferring to spend her holidays without her daughter as a hanger-on with the aristocratic Cumnors. Nevertheless, the hurry and the certain secrecy of the act of consumption emphasise its symbol as a forbidden fruit that Mrs Gibson indulges in. Maria A. Fitzwilliam argues that the secrecy of the act of eating expresses Mrs Gibson's, or Mrs Kirkpatrick's as she is called at this point of the narrative, attempt to realise the "autobiographical persona" of a respectable widow she has created for herself which obviously includes shunning food as a proof of "languid grief." Fitzwilliam further points out that there is a discrepancy between the "mournful aspect of the widow and her actual robustness of appetite", exemplified by her consumption of Molly's lunch.[473]

It can, however, be argued that the character's actions are not solely guided by the expectations of how a grieving widow should act but how a lady should. According to Anna Krugovoy Silver, "[t]he ideal Victorian woman was expected to regulate her food intake and monitor her appetite in order to conform to a slim ideal of beauty and, on a deeper and more important level, to normative, incorporeal conceptions of

[472] Maureen T. Reddy, "Men, Women, and Manners in *Wives and Daughters*," *Reading and Writing Women's Lives: A Study of the Novel of Manners*, eds. Bege K. Bowers and Barbara Brothers (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990) 76. On the other hand, Mary Debrabant sees Mrs Gibson's greedy-seeming act as an expression of her excellent survival instincts and her tendency to live off other people. In fact, Debrabant calls her a "natural parasite" who marries Mr Gibson, "an involuntary host", to ensure a comfortable existence and who shows her "rapacious nature of the alien who will appropriate the Gibson 'nest'" when eating the food intended for Molly (20-21).

[473] Maria A. Fitzwilliam, "The Needle not the Pen: Fabric (Auto)biography in *Cranford*, *Ruth*, and *Wives and Daughters*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 14 (2000) 10. She sees the widow's weeds the character wears as an integral part of creating a persona that is "quite different from her superficial self" (10). Fitzwilliam's 'autobiographical persona' seems to correspond with Campbell's 'character'.

femininity."[474] Slimness was associated with gentility and especially at the end of the nineteenth century a woman's body shape made the difference between the women from different social classes: a slim body was "a sign of social status".[475] The nineteenth-century fashion demanded an increasingly narrow waistline which was achieved by tight-lacing; the adversaries of corsets saw it as the cause for "lack of appetite and even starvation" in addition to numerous other ailments such as "curvature of the spine, respiratory problems and fainting".[476] Starvation was partly due to the fact that a woman wearing a tight-laced corset was unable to eat properly simply because the corset prevented the "normal expansion of the stomach." On the other hand, starvation could also be voluntary because it helped to achieve, with tight-lacing, the small waistline required by the fashion of the day.[477] The ideal eating practices of a woman would thus be a part of a complex ideological network of how a middle- and upper-class woman's identity was formed by her socio-cultural environment. Mrs Gibson's need to deny her appetite in public is manifest in the way she lets it be assumed that the child Molly has emptied the whole tray of food: "Molly could not help wishing that her pretty companion would have told Lady Cuxhaven that she herself had helped to finish up the ample luncheon" (WD 18). The fact that Molly feels ill and suffers from a headache is falsely attributed to the fact that she is suspected to have eaten too much and the shame of these suspicions bothers Molly: "Molly saw Lady Cuxhaven say something … and the child could not keep from tormenting herself by fancying that the words spoken sounded wonderfully like 'Over-eaten herself, I suspect'" (WD 18). Molly is assumed

[474] Silver, 48.
[475] Brumberg, 185-6.
[476] Mel Davies. "Corsets and Conception: Fashion and Demographic Trends in the Nineteenth Century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24.4 (1982) 628.
[477] Davies, 632. According to Mel Davies, the middle classes considered the corset a symbol of virtue, and a woman who did not wear a corset was not wholly respectable (619). Men, too, used different devices to mould their bodies and a corset was recommended to men as helping to achieve a good posture. The male use of a corset was nevertheless often considered a sign of vanity, and never reached the proportions of that of the female corset.

to be greedy and having no control over her appetite and her eating; the fact that she is described as being pained by such assumptions is an indication of her understanding of the negative associations of lack of control in matters of eating.

While Helena Michie only tentatively links the Victorian female characters' conformity to the ideals of eating with the symptoms of anorexia, Silver argues that "[a]norexia nervosa … is deeply rooted in Victorian values, ideologies, and aesthetics, which together helped define femininity in the nineteenth century."[478] Although it is tempting to see anorexia and the control and self-control of female appetite and hunger in the Victorian era as directly connected, it is not viable, as Silver too admits, to retrospectively diagnose Victorian women or female characters with anorexia. When the hungry Mrs Gibson declines food served at a lunch with the Cumnors by responding to offers of food by insisting that she has no midday appetite she is partly conforming to the ideal of womanhood: "I never eat meat in the middle of the day; I can hardly eat anything at lunch" (WD 275). Nevertheless, as strong a motivation for her behaviour are her aspirations to appear genteel and her propensity to socially emulate the fashionable upper classes, in this case their meal times, and her main worry is that a duchess visiting the Cumnors "might go away with the idea that the Hollingford doctor's wife dined early" (WD 276). Veblen maintains that even the motive of "physical want" is often overridden by the motive of emulation[479] and it is clear that Mrs Gibson's hunger for food and hunger for social distinction clash considerably for she is described as "sending away her plate of untasted food – food that she longed to eat, for she was really desperately hungry" (WD 276). Her motives are thus mixed but rather than anorexia which can be seen as a means to gain control over oneself, her behaviour is an attempt to gain social esteem.

[478] Silver, 3.
[479] Veblen, 35.

The fact that Mrs Gibson feels it necessary to hide her hunger and appetite for food in public would in some sense confirm Michie's contention that female characters in Victorian fiction are rarely depicted as eating. It is nevertheless clear that Mrs Gibson's non-eating is a performance meant for public occasions and therefore part of the character she is creating. When greedily consuming Molly's lunch at the summer festival at the Towers (and hence being described as eating) and letting everybody assume that the food has been eaten by the girl, she is hiding her appetite from public scrutiny. The difference between her public and private consumption, and thus also her hypocrisy, is further exposed by the narrator's revelations of her habits of consumption when in private. A proposal that she should have her future step-daughter stay with her at her school before her marriage to Mr Gibson is unpleasant because it would mean

> a serious farewell to many little indulgences, that were innocent enough in themselves, but which [her] former life had caused her to look upon as sins to be concealed: the dirty dog's-eared delightful novel from the Ashcombe circulating library, the leaves of which she turned over with a pair of scissors; the lounging-chair which she had for use at her own home, straight and upright as she sat now in Lady Cumnor's presence; the dainty morsel, savoury and small, to which she treated herself for her own solitary supper. (WD 130)

Mrs Gibson's list of indulgences equates different pleasures – eating, reading and lounging – which her upbringing and life experience has taught her to consider sinful pleasures. She treats herself in secret not only with light and pleasurable food but also with light and pleasurable reading, the two of which can be seen as having metaphorical connections. Maggie Kilgour notes that "[r]eading is … eating, an act of consumption"[480] and the Victorians saw close metaphorical affinities between these two acts. Similar to eating, reading was also seen as having either beneficial or harmful effects on individuals, as well as on society as a whole. Fiction was often considered

[480] Kilgour, 9.

compulsive; in 1877 Noah Porter equated the appetite for novels with that for sweet food arguing that an appetite for novels "like that for confectionery and other sweets is the sooner cloyed, and that if pampered too long it enfeebles the appetite for all other food."[481] For Porter, continuous novel reading creates an addiction similar to drug addiction: it is "to the mind as a kind of intellectual opium eating."[482] Novels, and especially romances, were thus seen as consumption that might have severe side effects. According to Ross, the nineteenth-century librarians felt it their duty to control and guide the readers' appetite for "[a]s with eating, there is a sensual pleasure in reading, but also a danger that this pleasure may be a cause of harmful immoderation."[483] In other words, eating too much and the wrong kind of food leads to unpleasant results and therefore one's eating as well as reading should be controlled. A taste for lighter reading was also considered lower-class in the nineteenth century and Mrs Gibson's need to hide her habit of reading novels from a circulating library, the source of light romantic fiction, reveals a wish not to be associated with lower-class habits. The fact that she is represented as indulging in these pleasures only in private implies the dualistic and hypocritical nature of not only the character but also the social and cultural context within which she operates.

In Gaskell's *Ruth*, a young woman called Jemima, when going to have tea with friends is advised by her father to curb her appetite: "And do not eat much; you can have plenty at home on your return" (R 181). The motive for the advice is not the wish to hide female appetite in public but the father's rather patronising and condescending

[481] Noah Porter, *Books and Reading: or, What Books Shall I Read and How Shall I Read Them?* 4th ed. (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1877) 231-232. Quoted in Catherine Sheldrick Ross, "Metaphors of Reading," *Journal of Library History, Philosophy and Comparative Librarianship* 22 (1987) 149.
[482] Porter in Ross, 149.
[483] Ross, 157. Pamela Gilbert argues that in the nineteenth-century reading could be a metaphor not just for eating but also for "sexual intercourse" considering that both are about "transgression of physical boundaries" and capable of producing sensual pleasure (Pamela K. Gilbert, "Ingestion, Contagion, Seduction: Victorian Metaphors of Reading," *Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 8.1, 1997, 84).

view of the hosts' level of wealth. He further exhorts his daughter not to take sugar in her tea for in his opinion the hosts "should not be able to afford sugar, with their means" (R 181). The pleasure of the visit is lessened by the father's advice and Jemima, although "as hungry as a hound, confined herself to one piece of the cake which her hostess had had such a pleasure in making. … Poor Jemima! The cakes were so good, and she was so hungry" (R 182).

In *Wives and Daughters*, the secrecy connected with the appeasing of hunger is linked with Mrs Gibson's aspirations to behave like a real lady which are manifest in her attempts to give the desired genteel qualities an embodied expression. Mrs Gibson's acts of consumption, whether of food or other commodities, express her wish to create and maintain a certain ideal character which is modelled mostly on the concepts of social ideals. When having guests for lunch she is shown to realise a character she obviously considers as reflecting the ideal of genteel femininity by making choices concerning food consumption and behaviour in general:

> Then there was lunch, when every one was merry and hungry, excepting the hostess, who was trying to train her midday appetite into the genteelest of all ways, and thought (falsely enough) that Dr Nicholls was a good person to practise the semblance of ill-health upon, and that he would give her the proper civil amount of commiseration for her ailments, which every guest ought to bestow upon a hostess who complains of her delicacy of health. (WD 325)

Mrs Gibson's aspirations are nevertheless ridiculed by the guest who is described as "too cunning to fall into this trap" (WD 325) and who, instead of sympathising with Mrs Gibson's alleged ailments, makes empty her attempts to feign illness and to distinguish herself as a lady with a non-existing appetite by encouraging her to partake of "the coarsest viands on the table" (WD 325). Mrs Gibson is depicted as being fully aware of the social implications of a middle- and upper-class woman's ill health; the

fact that she is described as having to train her appetite and to practise the part of the delicate lady of the house suggests that she is playing a role and emulating the ideal behaviour of a refined lady. Her "semblance of ill-health" (WD 325) is contrasted with the real ill-health of Squire Hamley's wife; the fact that Mrs Hamley epitomises what Mrs Gibson aspires to is implied in the fact that she is described as realising the conduct book maxim: she really eats very little and when at the dinner table "sent for fan and smelling-bottle to amuse herself with" (WD 67) as if detaching herself from the gross activity of eating. Mrs Hamley is not just a near invalid but is also depicted as a near angel whose good influence extends to the motherless Molly Gibson who is a regular visitor to the Hamely house before her father's second marriage. According to Joan Brumberg, "[t]he woman who put soul over body was the ideal of Victorian femininity … [and o]ne of the most convincing demonstrations of a spiritual orientation was a thin body – that is, a physique that symbolized rejection of all carnal appetites."[484] Illness, like slight appetite, was thus not only a sign of gentility but also of virtue and goodness. Unlike Mrs Gibson whose character the narrator describes as "superficial and flimsy" (WD 140) and whose behaviour and aspirations are ridiculed and even implicitly criticised in the narrative, Mrs Hamley is described as "tender and good" (WD 43); she has sacrificed her own interests and the London society for a quiet life with her husband and sons and as a consequence "sank into ill-health; nothing definite; only she never was well" (43). Whereas Mrs Gibson's ill-health is presented as a social tool, Mrs Hamley's illness is real enough to lead to her death. Her illness could be considered as what is now known as a psychosomatic illness; the narrator points out that she might not

[484] Brumberg, 182. Similarly, Bram Dijkstra argues that the nineteenth-century culture considered physical illness and wasted look visual manifestations of a woman's ability to practise saintly self-negation and to achieve spiritual purity (Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 28).

have been suffering from ill-health if she would not have been "deprived of all her strong interests" (WD 43).[485]

In *Wives and Daughters* the idea of the body as a reflection of one's taste and social class is both confirmed and contested. It is specifically the male body that is under scrutiny and as Karen Boiko states, most of the descriptions of male bodies are linked "explicitly to social class."[486] When Mr Gibson first moves to Hollingford to begin his practice his social identity becomes the object of speculation in "the Hollingford society" who suspect him to be "the illegitimate son of a Scotch duke, by a Frenchwoman" (WD 30) because he speaks with a Scottish accent, is dark-haired and has been to Paris. Further evidence for his possible gentility is seen in the build of his body which was "thin enough to be called 'a very genteel figure,' in those days, before muscular Christianity had come into vogue" (WD 30). The narrator's comment on the trends of different body shapes reflects one of the changes in the masculine body ideal in the Victorian era: from thin and slender into more robust and muscular. The mid-Victorian muscular Christianity equated moral and (male) physical health and saw them as reflecting the idea of both Englishness and masculinity. Mr Gibson's popularity with the aristocratic Cumnors and the fact that "[h]e might lunch with a duke any day that he chose" (WD 38) in their house is partly attributed to his genteel appearances: "He had not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his bones; and leanness goes a great way to gentility" (WD 39). Yet his eating practices contest the idea especially in the eyes of his new wife who struggles with the idea of a genteel-looking man willingly consuming cheese. On the other hand, although the Cumnors' land agent Mr Preston's good looks,

[485] Even if Elizabeth Gaskell herself would have admired "sanity, health and vitality" (Enid L. Duthie, *The Themes of Elizabeth Gaskell*, London: Macmillan, 1980, 138), she seems to have had a notion of the connotations of a woman's ailments in her time. Mrs Buxton in Gaskell's "The Moorland Cottage" is a similar character to Mrs Hamley. She, too, is 'genteelly' and chronically ill and depicted as a near saint.
[486] Karen Boiko, "Reading and (Re)Writing Class: Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33 (2005) 95.

athletic body, and sporting skills provide him "admission into much higher society than he was otherwise entitled to enter" (WD 153) he is not approved by either Lady Harriet nor Lady Cumnor. He is a character whose "class identity is ambiguous"[487] and it is this ambiguity that partly facilitates his fairly free mingling with different social classes and helps him to create a social identity. Nevertheless, despite his genteel body build he is considered an "underbred fop" (WD 161) by Lady Harriet and his attractions are actually dismissed by Lady Cumnor who thinks that land agents "belong to the class of people whose appearances I [do not] notice" (WD 95).

The idea that thinness equates with gentility is further discussed in the different body builds of the male members of the Hamley family. Squire Hamley's appraisal of the build of himself and his two sons, Osborne and Roger, reveals not only the prevalent association of birth, body and social position but also the illusionary nature of such associations:

> [I am of] as good and as old a descent as many in England, and I doubt if a stranger to look at me, would take me for a gentleman, with my red face, great hands and feet, and thick figure, fourteen stone, and never less than twelve even when I was a young man; and there's Osborne, who takes after his mother, who could not tell her great-grandfather from Adam, bless her; and Osborne has a girl's delicate face, and a slight make, and hands and feet as small as a lady's. … Roger is like me, a Hamley of Hamleys, and no one who sees him in the street will ever think that red-brown, big-boned, clumsy chap is of gentle blood. (WD 73-4)

Osborne's genteel looks combined with his poetic aspirations make him a representative of the Romantic ideal of the male especially in the mind of the young Molly Gibson.

[487] d'Albertis, 144. Linda K. Hughes argues that the vigorous and ambitious "man on the make" Mr Preston represents "the rapaciousness of modernity"(Linda K. Hughes, "*Cousin Phillis, Wives and Daughters*, and Modernity," *The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Gaskell*, ed. Jill L. Matus, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 100). Hilary M. Schor places Mr Preston into "the mercantile class" (191). On the other hand, Louise Henson sees Roger Hamley as a representative of "the mercantile class" obviously because his maternal grandfather was a merchant (Louise Henson, "History, Science and Social Change: Elizabeth Gaskell's 'Evolutionary' Narratives," *Gaskell Society Journal* 17, 2003, 24). Yet he is the younger son of a squire which makes him a representative of the land-owning gentry.

When she first meets Osborne Hamley she realises that the image of "a poetical … hero" (WD 167) she has formed of him in her mind does not totally correspond with reality: "The ideal was agile, yet powerful, with Greek features and an eagle-eye, capable of enduring long fasting, and indifferent as to what he ate. The real was almost effeminate in movement, though not in figure; … He was dainty in eating, and had anything but a Homeric appetite" (WD 167). The ability to bear hunger and especially the indifferent attitude to eating paint a picture of an individual who, like the fasting saints, is more concerned with matters of the mind than the body including bodily needs such as hunger. In reality, despite the fact that he is "frail in appearance" (WD 167) Osborne is described as being anything but indifferent about food: he is particular and even fastidious about what he eats. After the death of his mother, Osborne is frequently invited to dinner at the Gibsons' house and he is happy to accept the invitations, partly because of the "agreeable … feminine presence" but mostly because the food served is preferable to what he is served at home: "the meals, light and well cooked, suited his taste and delicate appetite so much better than the rich and heavy viands prepared by the servants at the Hall" (WD 309). Osborne's preferences as regards to food seem to correspond with his slightly effeminate body image but they also imply a preference to food that has more genteel connotations than the food that he eats at home. Despite the old descent of the Hamley family they are not wealthy yet the dinners are "overloaded with joints and game and sweets" (WD 259) provided by the estate; it is these that Osborne is willing to trade for the more delicate dainties on Mrs Gibson's table. His brother Roger is the opposite of him when it comes to health and constitution for Roger's "strong health" (WD 367) is even seen as the reason for his academic success: "the tutor said that only half of Roger's success was owing to his mental powers; the

other half was owing to his perfect health, which enabled him to work harder and more continuously than most men without suffering" (WD 367).

Even if one would not go as far as to claim that Osborne's early death symbolises the fact that "despite birth order and physical appearance, the hard working and unpretentious Roger, not Osborne, is the true gentleman" as Karen Boiko does,[488] it can be argued that the fact that Roger succeeds in what Osborne fails at and that he survives Osborne who dies of heart disease can be seen as reflecting the emergence of a new idea of the social image of masculinity as well as gentility. Boiko sees the novel recording a change in the way social position is understood and that one of the ways this change is shown is in the "shifting … from rank to class".[489] In the nineteenth century, the definition of a gentleman based on rank gave way to a more ambiguous understanding of the concept of 'gentleman'. Robin Gilmour notes that because "gentlemanliness … was a moral and not just a social category" it went beyond the limits of rank, a fact that made it both an accessible and attractive status for the socially mobile Victorians.[490] Birth was no longer a crucial factor in defining a gentleman although especially in the first half of the nineteenth century a gentleman was not supposed to earn his living by manual work or to be too conspicuously involved in business; it was the ability to live a leisured life that was an important sign of a gentleman's status. Gilmour points out that while the category of a gentleman widened

[488] Boiko, 99.

[489] Boiko, 86. Boiko argues that both Mrs Gibson and Lady Cumnor use the word 'gentleman' to refer to rank rather than social class (96). Susan E. Colón notes that the novel "illustrates the shift from aristocratic to professional values in 1820s-1830s Hollingford" (Susan E. Colón, "Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*: Professional and Feminine Ideology," *Victorians Institute Journal* 35, 2007, 11). Maureen T. Reddy also makes similar conclusions in "Men, Women, and Manners in *Wives and Daughters*." Mary Debrabant, on the other hand, argues that the novel "questions the validity of class hierarchy and denounces age-old customs which are inappropriate in a post-Darwinian world" (20). In her comical admiration of the upper classes Mrs Gibson can be seen as clinging on to social values and a way of life that is already losing part of its prestige.

[490] Gilmour, 3. The question of how to define a gentleman, or how to become one, was dealt extensively in fiction in the latter half of the nineteenth century. For example, Charles Dickens addresses the issue in *Great Expectations* (1861) and so does Dinah Craik in *Jack Halifax, Gentleman* (1857). Anthony Trollope discusses it in several of his novels such as *Doctor Thorne* (1858) or *The Duke's Children* (1880).

to include representatives of groups which previously would not have had access to it, such as general practitioners, more "utilitarian" groups such as engineers were not included. At the end of the nineteenth century, education "at a reputable public school" became a factor in determining the status of a gentleman.[491]

In *North and South* the concept of 'gentleman' is discussed when Margaret Hale and Mr Thornton seem to understand it differently from each other. Mr Thornton makes the distinction between a "gentleman" and "true man" (NS 163), arguing that a "man is to me a higher and a completer being than a gentleman" (NS 163). For him, 'gentleman' is "a term that only describes a person in his relation to others; but when we speak of him as 'a man,' we consider him not merely with regard to his fellow-men, but in relation to himself, – to life – to time – to eternity" (NS 163). In much the same vein Samuel Smiles claims in *Self-Help* (1859), the popular self-help book for the socially mobile Victorians, that "[r]iches and rank have no necessary connexion with genuine gentlemanly qualities. The poor man may be a true gentleman, ―in spirit and in daily life. He may be honest, truthful, upright, polite, temperate, courageous, self-respecting, and self-helping, ―that is, be a true gentleman."[492] As Gilmour notes, Mr Thornton's thoughts reflect the emerging concept of masculinity which stressed sincere and straightforward 'manliness' as opposed to the alleged "effeminacy" and slavery to decorum of a 'gentleman'.[493]

When Mrs Gibson wishes her husband to conform to the requirements of a gentleman, she refers to his, and consequently her own, potential elevation in the social scale rather than his moral qualities. Her definition of a gentleman also leans solely on

[491] Gilmour, 7-8..
[492] Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help; with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (London: John Murray, 1860) 347.
[493] Gilmour, 85. Raffaella Antinucci claims that Mr Thornton is Gaskell's prototype of a "industrial gentleman, associated with the elements of North, city, industry, present, and workshop" (Raffaella Antinucci, "*North and South*: an Industrial Version of the Victorian Gentleman," *Elizabeth Gaskell, Victorian Culture, and the Art of Fiction: Original Essays for the Bicentenary*, ed. Sandro Jung, Gent: Academia Press, 2010, 132).

looks, and behaviour, both not only rather superficial ways to define social worth but also potentially misleading and even precarious. This is clearly shown in "The Squire's Story" (1853), in which Gaskell had already explored the theme more fully, when a man who has been considered a gentleman because of his appearance, his obvious wealth, and his skills as a horseman, and who is said to go "regularly to collect his rents from his estates in the south" (39) turns out to be a highwayman who regularly goes south to rob people, which is the source of his wealth. Although Mr Gibson himself has the idea that his success in Hollignford is the result of his skills as a doctor, as Tabitha Sparks notes,[494] it is nevertheless Mr Gibson's more superficial attractions, his "elegant figure" and his "distinguished manner" (WD 38), which, rather than his professional skills per se, seem to ensure his professional success among the Hollingford population.

When returning from a scientific expedition to Africa, Roger's appearances have changed, instead of big-boned and clumsy he is "taller … [and] looks broader, stronger – more muscular" (WD 589) as if epitomising the body build of the muscular Christianity in "vogue" (WD 30). Thinness and a certain delicacy of the male appearances as the attributes of a gentleman, and as connected to gentility, reflect also the nineteenth-century ideal of the controlled and civilised body. Silver argues that "fat … symbolize[d] desire, hunger, and impulse for the Victorians" and therefore leanness expressed the ability to keep these under control.[495] Squire Hamley's 'thick figure' goes against his position as a gentleman and could therefore be seen as reflecting lack of control when it comes to desires, which is also seen in his inability to control his emotional self and his feelings in certain situations.

[494] Tabitha Sparks, *The Doctor in the Victorian Novel: Family Practices* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 75. According to Sparks, Mr Gibson's idea reflects "his empirical approach to human behaviour" (75).
[495] Silver, 10. Janice Carlisle argues that by the 1860s, "to be fat was to be ungenteel and old-fashioned" (58).

Emotions and Feelings: "A better vintage than usual"

Food embodies a variety of emotions and giving food or feeding somebody can be an expression of love and appreciation, or a reward. On the other hand, food and drink can also be the loci of unpleasant associations, even of one's family relationships. Lupton notes how sweets and sweet foods, for example, are often used as a means to discipline children by rewarding good behaviour with a treat or punishing bad behaviour by depriving them of sweet foods.[496] When the elder son Osborne Hamley does poorly in his university exams and thus fails in the expectations of an academic career and a fellowship, and has run up bills, including those for "wine" (WD 192), which his father is expected to pay, the father's displeasure is shown in an act that dismisses Osborne's preferences when it comes to wine. As the first-born son and the heir to Hamley Hall, his "likes and dislikes had been the law of the house in general … If he had liked any particular food or drink, any seat or place … his wishes were to be attended to" (WD 87). When at dinner table, his ambitious plans for his son thwarted and feeling disappointed, Squire Hamley feels "the need of outward stimulus – of a better vintage than usual" (WD 87). Thus he orders the butler to bring in a bottle of Osborne's favourite wine:

> 'Bring up a bottle of the Burgundy with the yellow seal.'
> He spoke low; he had no spirit to speak in his usual voice. The butler answered in the same tone. …
> 'If you please, sir, there are not above six bottles of that seal left; and it is Mr Osborne's favourite wine.'
> The squire turned round with a growl in his voice.
> 'Bring up a bottle of the burgundy with the yellow seal, as I said.' (WD 87)

Wine here replaces food as a commodity used to discipline a child; through the choice of wine the character expresses his feelings towards his absent son. By opening one of

[496] Lupton, 54.

the last bottles of Osborne's favourite wine and thus denying him his pleasure the father is punishing his son and at the same time removing his prerogative to choose when it comes to food consumption, albeit only temporarily.

Mr Hamley and the younger son Roger enjoy the wine, but their visitor Molly, who "never took wine" (WD 87) wishes to demonstrate her allegiance to Osborne and show her displeasure towards Mr Hamley and Roger by refusing the wine: "as an open mark of fealty to the absent Osborne, however little it might be understood, she placed the palm of her small brown hand over the top of the glass, and held it there, till the wine had gone round" (WD 88). The fact that she has not yet met Osborne during her visit to Hamley Hall but is ready to show allegiance to him manifests the pervading idea in the household that his wishes are considered the law. Molly's gesture is to a certain extent futile because it is not noticed by the other diners partly because they, as well as the servants, know that she does not usually drink wine. Nevertheless, Molly's refusal implies the power of choice when it comes to consuming edible commodities: by accepting or refusing food or drink provided the consumer can seek to please or displease the provider. It is a form of rebellion yet at its most extreme form refusing to consume food can be used as a powerful weapon. Hunger strikers and anorexics all use their own body to express various emotions and to gain goals because one's body can be seen as being the only thing over which one can actually exercise any control. When Molly refuses the wine, it is a mild form of using one's body as a tool for expressing oneself: she cannot express her disapproval in speech but she can refuse to drink the wine which should be reserved for Osborne.

Squire Hamley's displeasure with his elder son, his academic failure and his reluctance to find a suitable wife, and his pleasure in his younger son's academic success is further expressed through the medium of drink when he decides to tap a

barrel of ale brewed when Osborne was born: "I thought to have tapped it on his marriage, but I don't know when that will come to pass, so we've tapped it now in Roger's honour" (WD 364-5). The tapping of the ale is a symbol of his disappointment but he is also using the drink to drown his sorrows for when he offers the ale, "as strong as brandy" (WD 365), to Mr Gibson, he has "evidently been enjoying the young squire's ale to the verge of prudence" (WD 365). Food is nevertheless also a vehicle for positive feelings for Squire Hamley for when Mrs Hamley is seriously ill and Molly is staying at Hamley Hall again to keep her company she has "*tête-à-tête* meals" (WD 194) with Mr Hamley who tries "to make them pleasant to Molly, feeling deeply grateful to her for her soothing comfort" (WD 196). His gratitude is expressed not so much in words as it is in gestures: he has noticed that Molly likes "brown *buerré* pears" and therefore gives orders to search for them "through the neighbourhood" and he also orders "up rare wines, which she did not care for; but tasted out of complaisance" (WD 197). Food and wine are used as a means to convey feelings and emotions and when Mr Hamley offers Molly rare samples of his wine-cellar he is expressing his appreciation and gratitude; when Molly, despite her dislike of it, accepts the wine offered, she is expressing her compassion through wanting to please him.

In a way Molly's new life with her stepmother is epitomised by the formalities of food consumption for they symbolise "the restraint she was under in her stepmother's presence" (WD 437).[497] Having been brought up by her father to a relative freedom from form at meal times, partly due to her father's profession which causes irregularity of dining hours and partly due to his disinterest in the genteel way of life, or in their social image, she finds the observance of rigid rules of dining constraining. She is made

[497] Mrs Gibson's ways of restraining Molly include her attempts to straighten and thus discipline Molly's curly hair. Molly, on the other hand, connects the curls with her deceased mother and her love: she has a memory of her mother "twining the wet rings of dark hair fondly round her fingers, and then, in an ecstasy of fondness, kissing the little curly head" (WD 447).

acquainted with the weariness of the genteel way of dining already before the new step-mother begins her rule in the Gibson household. When Molly is visiting Hamley Hall for a few weeks before her father's marriage, "the stately dinner" (WD 67) in the big dining room on the first night with servants carrying "things forwards and backwards" seems "a wearisome business" (WD 67) to her and makes her miss home and its less formal habits of food consumption: she "even regretted the crowded chairs and tables, the hurry of eating, the quick unformal manner in which everybody seemed to finish their meal as fast as possible" (WD 67). In addition to the loss of "perfect freedom of intercourse with her father" (WD 67) which has defined Molly's childhood, and which she misses, her father's new marriage means a change in the way food is presented and consumed. For Molly, who is still under twenty years old, the happiness and the freedom of her life before the new Mrs Gibson enters the family are symbolised by the less formal and more homely food consumption practices. Thus when Mrs Gibson is going for a visit for a few days, Molly sees this as a welcome opportunity not only to spend time with her father but also briefly to return to the past: "her heart danced at the idea of … old times come back again; of meals without perpetual fidgetiness after details of ceremony and correctness of attendance" (WD 437). It is however not only the less ceremonial ways of food consumption she misses, but also the kind of food they used to eat and the way they used to eat it. Thus the absence of Mrs Gibson gives the opportunity to return to the old ways: "We'll have bread and cheese for dinner, and eat it on our knees; we'll make up for having had to eat sloppy puddings with a fork instead of a spoon all this time, by putting our knives in our mouths till we cut ourselves. Papa shall pour his tea into his saucer if he is in a hurry; and if I'm thirsty, I'll take the slop-basin" (WD 437). Molly's plans to engage in the "unrefined and ungenteel" (WD 439) ways of food consumption are a nostalgic return to the good old days of her childhood

but they also represent Molly's way of rebelling against the restraining formalities represented by her step-mother.

Cooking by the (French) Book

The arrival of the new Mrs Gibson in the Gbson household means changes both in meal times and in the meals themselves. These changes are disapproved of by the cook who leaves not only because she objects to the changes in meal times but also because she disapproves of the kind of food she is expected to prepare:

> [B]eing a Methodist, … [she] objected on religious grounds to trying any of Mrs Gibson's new receipts for French dishes. It was not scriptural, she said. There was a deal of mention of food in the Bible; but it was of sheep ready dressed, which meant mutton, and of wine, and of bread and milk, and figs and raisins, of fatted calves, a good well-browned fillet of veal and such like; but it had always gone against her conscience to cook swine-flesh and make raised pork-pies, and now if she was to be set to cook heathen dishes after the fashion of the Papist she'd sooner give it all up together. (WD 178)

Consuming certain kinds of food, or in this case preparing it, can be seen as an expression of collective identity, or as Fischler puts it of a "membership of a culture or a group."[498] Refusing to eat or prepare food that is not part of the culture or the group of which one is a member is to refuse the other, and all the properties one associates with it. When the cook refuses to prepare food that she, a Methodist, considers "Papist" she is expressing a membership of the Protestant creed; her refusal to prepare food other than "scriptural" is an expression of a refusal to be a Papist and a fear of incorporating the properties of a "heathen". For her, even preparing food with foreign influence is a threat to her identity both as a Methodist and an Englishwoman. Her reasons for the refusal seem to be a mixture of the religious and the patriotic: the food Mrs Gibson

[498] Fischler, 280.

wants her to prepare is also French. The cook's argument nevertheless leads to a conclusion that not only does she consider French food "heathen" but if one is what one eats then French themselves, as Catholics, must also be thus. Spiering notes how food carries connotations of nationality and national character; the imagined character of the French in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Protestant England was reflected in the image of their cooking: "The unnatural, dishonest tendencies of the Catholic French … were visible in their preference for over-refined, embellished dishes."[499] After the cook leaves, "Mr Gibson had to satisfy his healthy English appetite on badly made omelettes, rissoles, vol-au-vents, croquets, and timbales; never being exactly sure what he was eating" (WD 178). From a patriotic point of view, the narrator's comment on Mr Gibson's "healthy English appetite" could be read as pointing out how foreign food, or food one is not used to, cannot completely satisfy one's appetite. The words "badly made" also reveal that the new cook who is obviously willing to cook 'heathen' dishes is nevertheless either not a very good cook or simply out of her depth with French-style cookery.

Although middle-class and lower-class cookery in general remained essentially English, French-style food was extremely popular among the upper and the upper-middle classes.[500] According to Stephen Mennell, the influence of French cuisine is seen in the large number of cookbooks for both professional and domestic cooks written during the nineteenth century by French chefs working in England.[501] French food was in vogue and to consume French food, or at least French-sounding food, was to have a

[499] Spiering, 35.
[500] Mennell, 206.
[501] Mennell, 135. Mennell argues that anybody desiring to cook in the fashionable French fashion would have consulted either Alexis Soyer's *The Gastronomic Regenerator: a Simplified and Entirely New System of Cookery* or Charles Francatelli's *The Modern Cook*. Both authors were famous nineteenth-century professional cooks (Mennell, 213). In a true celebrity chef style, Soyer, for example, also had his own range of products such as "stoves and soup-kitchens, cutlery and kitchen-gadgets, 'Soyer's Nectar,' [and] Soyer's sauces" (Paul Thomas Murphy "Culinary Utilitarian: Ideology in the Work of Alexis Benoît Soyer" *Victorians Institute Journal*, 35, 2007, 172).

certain social identity; French-style food became a sign of social class and was adopted by those wishing to socially emulate the upper classes and their fashionable lifestyle. On the other hand, for the middle classes, the thrifty management of the household was a sign of respectability and the skill of the mistress and Dena Attar argues that transforming leftovers, such as cold meat, into a French sounding and "genteel-looking dish" satisfied the demand for both economical and imitative use of food. Croquettes, for example, were a very convenient way to serve leftovers in a household that could spend money on fairly large amounts of food but who could not afford to ignore the leftovers.[502] The fact that the French-influenced cooking was not always successful and one sometimes had to eat 'badly' made food, is an indicator that the person who prepared the food had not always enough skill to cook it. Often both the cook and the mistress were equally ignorant of the proper way of cooking in the French way in which case it was necessary to consult a cookbook.

Although Mrs Gibson might have formerly indulged in "delightful novel[s]" (WD 130) in private, and even if "[a]bout novels and poetry … she always made exactly the remarks which are expected" (WD 97), she is described as rather averse to books and learning, despite her past as a governess. She slightly disapproves of her step-daughter Molly reading "deep books" and is afraid that this will make her "a blue-stocking by and by" (WD 267). She sees an interest in "facts and figures" (WD 267) as creating the wrong kind of social image for she advises both her daughters "not to be a blue-stocking, because gentle-people don't like that kind of woman" (WD 267). Mrs Gibson does nevertheless show an interest in certain kinds of facts and figures for her favourite reading is, most tellingly, the "Red Book" (WD 311) or the *Peerage* which lists the nobility and their rank: "One of the few books she had brought with her into Mr

[502] Attar, 129.

Gibson's house was bound in pink, and in it she studied 'Menteith, Duke of, Adolphus George,' &c. &c., till she was fully up in all the duchess's connections, and probable interests" (WD 275). Facts and figures that are connected with the people she admires and the class she aspires to do not seem to have the undesired effect of turning a woman into a blue-stocking; on the contrary, it is knowledge that helps Mrs Gibson to further her social ambitions among the 'gentle-people'.

In addition to lists of nobility, Mrs Gibson is described as resorting to another kind of written information in her quest for social distinction. When her former brother-in-law, a recently appointed Queen's Counsel from London, comes for a visit, Mrs Gibson buys "a new cookery-book to make it pleasant and agreeable and what he was used to" (WD 421). The Hollingford ladies, on the other hand, speculate about what he will be served:

> 'I've been wondering what they'll give him to dinner,' said Miss Browning. 'It is an unlucky time for visitors; no game to be had, and lamb so late this year, and chicken hardly to be had for love or money.'
>
> 'He'll have to put up with calves-head, that he will,' said Mrs Goodenough, solemnly. 'If I'd ha' got my usual health I'd copy out a receipt of my grandmother's for a rolled calves-head, and send it to Mrs Gibson. (WD 416)

Cooking by recipes handed down from mothers to daughters was a traditional way of preparing food. Often the recipes were handed down orally but sometimes domestic 'cookbooks' in the form of collection of written instructions would pass from one generation to another. Recipes were often treasured family heirlooms not to be parted with very easily, but in the eyes of social sophisticates family recipes did nevertheless often lack the social power of the recipes found in cookbooks written by professional chefs and housekeepers. If domestic recipes and especially their circulation were pivotal in "maintaining communal structure, social ties and cultural tradition" in the nineteenth

century, as Newlyn notes,[503] then by circulating her grandmother's recipe Mrs Goodenough would have been willing to sustain the idea of a community as well as include Mrs Gibson in the Hollingford (female) social network. Considering Mrs Gibson's pretensions to fashionable living and dining, as well as her reluctance to belong to the Hollingford community, it is questionable whether the gesture would have been appreciated.

Margaret Beetham notes that the change in how "knowledge, including practical knowledge, was codified and circulated" can be seen in the rapid increase in the production of numerous domestic manuals and cookbooks, for example. The knowledge that had previously been transmitted orally, and through experience, was now transformed into printed text.[504] Cookbooks had been written before the nineteenth century but in the nineteenth century they reached a wider audience due to increase in literacy and decrease in prices. Reay Tannahill notes that there was a great demand for cookbooks especially among the middle classes who had to adjust themselves to their changing social status and had to be able to perform according to it, and who realised that "traditional family recipes were not adequate for the purpose".[505] So mighty was the consuming power of the new middle classes that according to Tannahill most cookbooks published in the nineteenth century were actually targeted at the middle-class audience.[506] The celebrity chef Alexis Soyer, for example, produced immensely popular cookbooks dedicated to certain sections of society: *The Modern Housewife, or Ménagère* (1849) for the use of the middle classes and *A Shilling Cookery for the People* (1854) for the working class. As the word 'shilling' in the title of the latter book

[503] Newlyn, 32.
[504] Margaret Beetham, "Good Taste and Sweet Ordering: Dining with Mrs Beeton," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36.2 (2008) 397.
[505] Reay Tannahill, *Food in History* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1989) 323.
[506] Tannahill, 325. Gaskell herself seems to have been a consumer of cookbooks for in a letter to her American friend Charles Norton, dated in 1859, she thanks him for sending over American cookbooks and tells him that they have tried several recipes in them (*Letters of Mrs Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton 1855-1865*, ed. Jane Whitehill, London: Oxford University Press, 1932, 31)

indicates, the food prepared with the help of the book was intended to suit the low income of the working classes. Nevertheless, it seems that Soyer did not fully comprehend the lack of the consuming power of the lower classes for, as Mennell points out, a large number of the recipes in the book seem to require more pecuniary strength than could be attributed to the target audience.[507] Many of the books published, like Isabella Beeton's famous *Book of Household Management* (1861), combined a cookbook and a manual on how to manage a household and were often targeted at the middle classes living in the urban areas. They were partly manuals for the upwardly mobile individuals on how to survive in a socially unfamiliar environment: "Mrs Beeton wrote at length about precisely those matters which were causes of concern and social anxiety to the aspiring middle classes – etiquette, table settings, the hierarchy of servants".[508] In fact, Christopher Clausen argues that Beeton's book could be classified as one of the self-help books abounding in the Victorian England which were meant to help to achieve a middle-class status: "how to get there and how to avoid being an impostor when you had arrived".[509]

Colin Spencer argues that the recipes in Beeton's *Book of Household Management* "reflect what the middle classes were eating and cooking in the midst of

[507] Mennell, 153. In 1861, Charles Francatelli also published a cookbook targeted at the working classes called *A Plain Cookery for the Working Classes*. Gilly Lehmann points out that Soyer's and Francatelli's cookbooks were the first ones written solely for the working classes (Gilly Lehmann, *The British Housewife: Cookery Books, Cooking and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Totnes: Prospect Books, 2003) 160.

[508] Mennell, 213. Beeton's book has recently attracted a lot of scholarly interest. See for example, Helen Day, "Möbial Consumption: Stability, Flux and Interpermeability in 'Mrs Beeton'," *Consuming Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century: Narratives of Consumption, 1700-1900*, eds. Tamara S. Wagner and Narin Hassan (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010); Margaret Beetham, "Good Taste and Sweet Ordering: Dining with Mrs Beeton," or Margaret Beetham, "Of Recipe Books and Reading in the Nineteenth Century: Mrs Beeton and her Cultural Consequences," *The Recipe Reader: Narratives, Contexts, Traditions*, eds. Janet Floyd and Laurel Forster (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

[509] Christopher Clausen, "How to Join the Middle Classes: With the Help of Dr. Smiles and Mrs. Beeton." *American Scholar* 62(3) 1993, 405. Lynette Hunter records a change in the type of cookbooks during the second half of the nineteenth century. She notes that books combining instructions on both cooking and household management in general gave way to "single-authored food books directed towards specialized aspects of household management: courses, foodstuffs, dishes, technology, commercial products, and meals themselves" (Lynette Hunter, "Profilerating Publications: The Progress of Victorian Cookery Literature," *Eating with the Victorians*, ed. C. Anne Wilson (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004, 50-1).

the nineteenth century".[510] Nevertheless, more than indicators of what people actually cook or eat in any given era, cookbooks are manuals of what they *should* eat and how food *should* be prepared. As such they could be seen as creating needs as well as certain patterns of consumption. Beeton's book, for example, gave outlines of how a household should operate and how and what it should consume to be able to be classified as middle-class. Natalie Kapetanios Meir suggests that the whole genre of Victorian "dining handbooks", including cookbooks and conduct books, came to rely on a certain kind of "dining taxonomy" which systematised the different aspects of food consumption and suggested that the procedures they prescribed were natural and not a convention.[511] In the subtitle to his book *The Gastronomic Regenerator,* Alexis Soyer professes to give recipes that are *Suited to the Income of All Classes*, but this does not mean that all classes are actually meant to use the same recipes. The book is basically divided into two sections, the first one is called "The Kitchen of the Wealthy" and the second one, meant for the "industrious classes of society," is called "My Kitchen at Home".[512] This division enforces the division of the society into separate classes and is prescriptive by nature since it does not leave the choice of how to use the cookbook and the recipes to the reader but rather emphasises the prevalent social division.[513] Paul Thomas Murphy notes that Alexis Soyer's most popular cookbook was *A Shilling Cookery for the People* which, instead of elaborate food and the presentation of it,

[510] Colin Spencer, *British Food: An Extraordinary Thousand Years of History* (London: Grub Street, 2002) 272.
[511] Meir, "'A Fashionable Dinner is Arranged as Follows'," 133.
[512] Alexis Soyer, *The Gastronomic Regenerator: A Simplified and Entirely New System of Cookery, with Nearly Two Thousand Practical Receipts Suited to the Income of All Classes*, 8th ed (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1852) xii.
[513] Mennell, 153. In *The Gastronomic Regenerator* Soyer gives designs for model kitchens for different target groups. Paul Thomas Murphy notes that although Soyer did acknowledge the difference in food consumption between the different classes, his suggestion for kitchen design for the working classes did not really correspond with what could be achieved in reality: "Soyer made clear with these designs, as he would with his cookbooks, that the range of dishes available to an individual very much depended upon one's socioeconomic status, but that the ability efficiently to produce a nutritious meal should not be beyond the means of anyone. It is worth noting, however, that the fittings even of the least expensive of Soyer's model kitchens would be well beyond the means of most of the working class" (177).

concentrated more on "the nutritional and economical".[514] Soyer claims to have actually visited the working class kitchens before writing his book[515] and therefore the recipes could reflect working-class food preferences. Yet as with any cookbooks written in any given era, it most probably reflected Soyer's idea of working-class preferences. On the other hand, it also manifests and enforces the division not only in the description of food consumption but also in the prescription of it; if Soyer considered "the cultural and culinary needs … of all classes … quite different" as Murphy argues,[516] then writing a cookbook and selecting recipes for it would have reflected the idea of proper food consumption for each social group. In nineteenth-century England the act of buying and using a cookbook was a class issue: as in other respects, the nation was also divided by what its members ate and how they prepared their food, and which instructions they were supposed to follow.

One could thus argue that cookbooks serve an ideological purpose in their implied guidance of the readers' food consumption. They could be seen as aiming to maintain the status quo of the social order by emphasising the distinction in food consumption between the different classes. In *Wives and Daughters* the cookbook serves an ideological purpose; Mrs Gibson is described as resorting to it to find out what kind of food the guest should be used to consuming and enjoying. It is not the question of the individual character's food preferences, they are not even implied, but rather the alleged preferences of the social class he represents. The act of buying a cookbook is significant for in the act culminates the character's social aspirations and her wish to socially distinguish herself from the culinary traditions of the likes of Mrs Goodenough and the Hollingford middle-class population in general. She is not described as worrying about the scarcity or the cost of provisions but rather about the social

[514] Murphy, 178.
[515] Mennell, 153.
[516] Murphy, 174.

connotations of her dinner table. The cookbook that she buys is a symbol of the lifestyle she wants to adopt; it enforces the performance of her desired social identity and at the same time manifests the consuming power of the household. The consumption of cookbooks helped to create and maintain the socially ideal character by suggesting ways to achieve this goal through food consumption. Nevertheless, the fact that Mrs Gibson has to consult a cookbook herself undermines her social pretensions for it makes her middle-class status very tangible. She is not able to leave the practicalities of the food preparation to a trained, professional cook like an upper-class mistress could have done.

Conclusions

In the novel, meals not only inadvertently create social images but they are also used to create and manipulate social images and identities. They express both economic and social status and the lunch that Mrs Gibson stages for Lady Harriet epitomises her skills as social manipulator and image maker for whom food consumption is finally a performance of the ideal character. Mrs Gibson represents the full-fledged social performer in the novel and her adulation and her emulation of the upper-class prestigious life-style is expressed in her food consumption practices. The times and the names of meals classify and are used to classify social groups in the novel; and food and drink are used not only to nourish or to refresh but also to articulate taste and social identities. Tea and wine are both loci of economic and social snobbery and the characters use them to draw and re-draw social boundaries. It is nevertheless cheese which epitomises social distinctions in the narrative; Mrs Gibson's social aspirations culminate in her dislike of cheese which she denies to her new husband because of its ungenteel social image.

The body and the body image are used to assess an individual's character and social position, including one's gentility and the right to be called a gentleman. Although female appetite was scrutinised and dictated in the nineteenth century, and while Mrs Gibson, for example, is described as limiting her food intake publicly she is not suffering from anorexia, an illness that many critics have seen as endemic among nineteenth-century female literary characters. Instead, by attempting to conform to expected norms of the behaviour of a lady in public she is articulating a sought after social identity. The shape and the size of male bodies as indication of class and rank are shown to be illusory; nevertheless, like consumption of food and drink, they, too, can be used to manipulate one's social image and even social identity. The representations of food and drink in the novel also reveal how food and drink are used to express emotions and feelings. By consuming his son's favourite wine, Squire Hamley expresses his displeasure at him while his gratitude to Molly is non-verbally articulated through the medium of food. On the other hand, Molly's rebellion against his new step-mother's rules and formalities of food consumption finds its expression in the choices she makes concerning food and its consumption when she is away.

The concept of food as something that constructs and reconstructs social, cultural and national identities is demonstrated in the narrative. The cook's refusal to prepare French-style food is an expression of both her religious and national identities, and even preparing foreign style food is a threat to her concept of herself as an Englishwoman. Cooking and eating French-style food was an indication of class in nineteenth-century England; it was popular among the upper classes but also among the socially ambitious who wished to redefine their social identity. Cookbooks, especially those written by French chefs working in England, catered for those who needed assistance in producing socially marked food and Mrs Gibson's purchase of a cookbook

to accommodate the tastes of a visitor is a symbol of her social aspirations. Cookbooks proliferated in the nineteenth century; they targeted different classes by providing recipes suitable for each one and in this way prescribed class consumption and enforced social boundaries.

8. Conclusion: Culture, Class, Gender

Analysing the representations of hunger, food, and drink in Gaskell's fiction reveals the way they are affected by and participate in other discourses of consumption circulating in the context of their production. The novels emerged from a specific social and cultural context in which food and drink were instrumental in constructing and defining identities. In an era in which socioeconomic boundaries were blurring, it was increasingly important to find ways to define one's relationship to the social order and consumption, both of goods and food, offered an arena to social reactionaries and social revolutionaries alike in which to confirm or to contest their place in the rapidly changing society. The representations of hunger and consumption in Gaskell's texts are expressive of concerns and preoccupations of their context and using new historicist methodology has proven a fruitful approach to a topic which is concerned with both human and social bodies and their textual and contextual history. In fact, one could argue that new historicist methodology with its emphasis on interdisciplinarity as well as its interest in the representations of material and corporeal has provided a legitimate manner of contextual analysis of representations of food consumption in literature in general and thus facilitated the rise of food studies.

The study of food and eating in literature is an expanding scholarship yet there are gaps in it which need filling. In Victorian studies, the initial interest of the feminist criticism in the representations of female metaphorical and literal starvation and their connections to the modern-day eating disorders occupied a prominent place in food studies for a long time. The nineteenth-century medical and social interest in the female body and the paradigms concerning (middle-class) female behaviour provided ample

material for gender-focused readings of Victorian literature. As important as these readings were, and still are, they overshadowed other concerns such as class, culture, and nation. Thus one of the initial aims of the present study was to go further and not to analyse the representations of hunger and consumption in Gaskell's texts solely from the female point of view but rather to consider the role of hunger and consumption in constructing identities and defining boundaries, whether of culture, class, or gender. Compared to the number of studies discussing middle-class female characters' relationship to food and hunger, the amount of work conducted concerning working-class characters' or male characters' relationship in this area is meagre. One of the leitmotifs of much of the earlier food studies in Victorian literature has been the metaphorical and literal (self-) starvation, either forced or voluntary, of mostly middle-class female characters. The tendency to use one's body as a means of control in Victorian literature has been seen as a female one since women had less or no access to power. Analysing the representations of hunger in industrial novels, in which hunger is always both implicitly and explicitly present, is surprisingly uncommon yet detailed reading of the representations of hunger in *Mary Barton* and *North and South* shows how much more wide reaching the concept of hunger is in Victorian fiction. When taking industrial action and declaring that they would rather starve to death than accept terms they deem inadequate, the hungry working-class male characters are planning to use the only weapon they feel they can control: their own body. As if foreshadowing the political hunger striking of a later era, the starving characters are presented as self-consciously using their hunger as a means of political protest, a means which in Victorian studies is mostly discussed in connection with the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century suffragettes. Especially in *North and South*, the working-class voice, Nicholas Higgins, reasons and even speculates about the motives and goals of voluntary

starvation which is further presented as a calculated act of solidarity towards those working-class characters who are financially ill prepared for the strike. Hunger and starvation are used as a means to influence the public opinion and to arouse sympathy by emphasising the hungry workers' position as powerless victims of relentless manufacturers and laissez-faire economics.

The representations of hunger in Gaskell's industrial novels are also a generic device; they reflect the rise of the humanitarian narrative and the change in how hunger and the hungry were perceived in the nineteenth century. Instead of being depicted as morally suspect and shunning work, the hungry poor are presented as victims of circumstances. From the twenty-first-century point of view, the hungry poor lack entitlement to food because they lack economic and social power due to the inability of the society to present solutions to economic and social deprivation. The aims of the humanitarian narrative are slightly undermined by the way the representations of hunger and starvation, especially in *Mary Barton*, present the working-class characters as being dragged down to the level of animalistic behaviour by their hunger. This emphasises the primaeval and bodily nature of hunger and accentuates the working-class characters' otherness. On the other hand, in *North and South*, the scene in which the workers' distress and starvation transform them metaphorically into hungry animals yearning after food and the blood of the mill-owners reflects the more or less acute fear and threat of working-class uprising which in *Mary Barton* remains less explicit.

In the field of Victorian studies, the interest in metaphorical hunger for love has more often concentrated on female characters and their emotional starvation, symbolised by the characters' wasting bodies, and often seen as an emblem of their sexual repression. Male characters' emotional hunger has often been overlooked and although Philip Hepburn's yearning love for his cousin Sylvia in *Sylvia's Lovers* does

not initially express itself as somatic symptoms it is presented as a deep hunger which can only be appeased by Sylvia without whom he will starve to death. And it is the male body that finally wastes away when Philip at the end of the novel starves to death and the literal and the metaphorical hunger come together. Philip's hunger for love is a destructive force in the novel and has its consequences: it kills Sylvia's spirit and prevents her from satisfying her hunger for love. To a certain extent his emotional starvation and especially its disastrous results are an emblem of (male) sexual repression which is nevertheless less the outcome of social control than it is of the character's religious leanings.

Albeit more conventionally female, hunger in *Cranford* is inextricably linked with class and with Victorian economics; it is the genteel hunger of impoverished middle-class ladies who attempt to maintain their social identities and the coherence of their social group by rules and regulations concerning food consumption. Analysing the representations of consumption in the novel shows that the concept of elegant economy is used to hide pecuniary distress and incompletely satisfied hunger but that it also provides the means to define the boundaries which separate the self from the other in a world and a society which is rapidly changing. The representations of food consumption in the novel imply hunger and reveal the good appetites of the central female characters who are not presented as being concerned about the Victorian ideals regarding female food consumption, which were finally ideals and not necessarily reality, but about the ideals regarding proper class consumption. On the other hand, *Wives and Daughters* presents a female character actively using the gender ideals in social performance in her attempt to manipulate her social environment; female hunger and pretended lack of appetite are connected with class and more specifically with social ambitions. What Gaskell's texts demonstrate is that reading female hunger in Victorian literature solely

as a symptom of a medical condition, whether physical or psychological, gives but a limited idea of how hunger was understood and experienced.

By concentrating on one author, so far mostly overlooked when it comes to food studies, I hoped to see if a pattern would emerge, that is, whether the representations of hunger and consumption in Gaskell's fiction would point to specific ways of constructing and defining identities and to an attempt to forge a common English identity or if they would reflect the heterogenousness of Victorian identities. The answer is that although there are certain parameters within which the characters operate and hunger and consumption are used to define and construct both individual and collective identities regardless of class or gender, Gaskell's texts do not present a concept of a uniform collective English identity. Forging a common collective identity through hunger and consumption is bound to remain abortive in a social and cultural context in which the perception and meanings of hunger, foodways, and even meal times are fairly divergent. Although Gaskell does not always provide a representation of a homogeneous national identity, in fact there is not always even an agreement on how to understand the nation as in *North and South*, the texts studied suggest that when it comes to food and drink, the attempts to construct a national identity are made through refusal and exclusion. In *Cranford*, incorporating French food is presented as a threat to cultural and national identities and in *Wives and Daughters* the cook's refusal to even prepare French style food indicates religious and cultural prejudices and even fears as well as the notion of how food's symbolic properties are incorporated by the consumer.

More significantly, though, food and drink in these texts define identities at the levels of class and gender: in *Mary Barton*, not to be able to incorporate meat which carries connotations of both Englishness and masculinity is a sign of exclusion of the poor working-class characters from the dominant meat-eating culture of those socially

and economically superior and consequently their otherness as regards to the normative middle-class culture. On the other hand, cheese in *Wives and Daughters* has opposite connotations for as an article of food it is a symbol of working-class vulgarity and to consume and incorporate cheese equates with incorporating its properties. Although ridiculed in the narrative, Mrs Gibson's dietary prejudices nevertheless reflect an important aspect of Victorian food consumption for the connotations of specific foods or drinks are cultural constructs rather than natural properties and are thus learnt. Food preferences can be inherited as part of cultural capital and used as kind of currency to negotiate social positions yet they can also be adopted. The increasing amount of different discourses such as domestic manuals, cookbooks, and self-help books circulating in the Victorian cultural and social marketplaces provided especially the rapidly growing middle class the opportunity to embrace the proper food preferences and food habits. These discourses created the illusion of natural and legitimate ways to consume food which were nevertheless only constructed as such.

Meals, meal times, and names of meals were expressions of social identity and a means to construct and enforce social images in Victorian England. This is emphasised in *Wives and Daughters* where economic and social statuses are negotiated and performed through food consumption; the characters are presented as being aware of the way foodways and taste define both socially and economically and seeking to enhance and manipulate their image in the eyes of the other characters. Contrary to *Cranford*, in which the characters' food consumption foibles are treated with a tolerant albeit amused tone, in *Wives and Daughters*, the descriptions of Mrs Gibson's social aspirations and emulative food consumption patterns imply criticism of her social pretensions. In some ways she is caught in the trap of ideological expectations of the nineteenth-century

female ideals yet her food consumption practices are used to create a character and manipulate a social image.

Not only individual articles of food and drink in the narratives function as indicators of the consumers' social and economic position and as a means to distinguish and to be distinguished but also the 'legitimate' manner in which food is or should be consumed. In a social and cultural context which was rapidly changing and in which social positions became more fluctuating and less easy to define, and the conspicuous consumption of goods as well as food was no more the privilege of the 'genteel' people, manners of consumption were used to distinguish between vulgar and proper. Stressing the importance of how food should be consumed and controlling manners of food consumption became a way to control one's social and cultural environment. This is manifest especially in *Cranford*, where struggling to eat peas with a fork epitomises the Victorian struggle for coping with the fear of losing control by using finally very transient concepts such as civilised/uncivilised. On the other hand, the concept of vulgarity is less explicitly used to define social and cultural values within the middle classes in *North and South*. The display of food and consumption at the Thorntons' dinner table expresses their economic power but from the perspective of Margaret Hale it also defines them socially. Her implicit judgement on the opulence and even ostentatiousness of the dinner as well as the Thorntons' home is an articulation of the wish to control social boundaries; since theoretically both the Thorntons and the Hales are of middle class, the boundary Margaret is guarding is the one between ranks rather than classes.

More traditional and more explicit control of social bodies through consumption is exercised by the middle class over the working class consumption of food and drink; In *North and South*, the patronising supervision of the parishioners' choices of drink

and of their cooking emphasises the traditional social divisions. The collective dining room scheme at the Thorntons' mill is a way to control the consumption of the workers and thus their individual and social bodies in a Foucauldian vein but it also redefines the relationship between the employer and the employees. The representations of collective food consumption in *Sylvia's Lovers* are about control in a different way for they control the social body from the inside. Although meals are indicators of both inclusion and exclusion in all of Gaskell's texts and food, formalities, order of seating and serving construct and reconstruct social identities as well as express differentiations within social communities, in *Sylvia's Lovers* the image of a community and communal spirit as well as the cohesion of the community are shown to be illusionary by nature, a fact which is revealed by the order of serving and seating and the hosts' calculated distribution of food and drink all of which reveal inner hierarchies within the community of the guests.

If there was an article of consumer goods which had pretensions of being the emblem of Englishness in Victorian England it was tea which was adopted as the drink of all. Not naturally English, it was constructed as such especially in the nineteenth-century tea discourse in which consumption of tea signified the shared prosperity and well-being of the nation. The shared national tea-drinking identity as well as the concept of tea as an English substance was nevertheless an illusion for tea was a foreign commodity and thus potentially a threat to the characters' identities. Yet unlike French food, its origins are never questioned in the novels nor is its consumption avoided, unless for health reasons or on the basis of its gender connotations. Consuming tea is a feminine way to socialise and serving tea a feminine occupation to the extent that the feminisation of a male character is emphasised by him performing the duties of the tea-table. In addition to being a substance to be consumed, tea is also the locus of snobbery

and rivalry and in this way defines economic and social boundaries: the price and the sort of tea one buys articulate the presence or absence of economic power and provides a way to distinguish oneself if not socially then at least economically.

Even more clearly connoting gender in Gaskell's novels is alcohol for consuming alcohol, especially spirits, or drinking too much have strong masculine connotations. To consume and to appreciate wine and especially to possess knowledge about wines indicate a masculine social identity as well as certain amount of cultural capital. In *Cranford*, the genteel ladies emphasise their respectability by professing ignorance of spirits and in *Sylvia's Lovers* alcohol expresses masculine identities and a masculine communal spirit from which respectable female characters are excluded. On the other hand, in Gaskell's industrial novels, drinking too much has class connotations; the alcohol addict and 'fallen' woman Esther in *Mary Barton* is beyond respectability as well as redemption and in *North and South* alcohol is the workers' means to escape the dreary reality and to break the monotony of their industrial lives. Nevertheless, contrary to the nineteenth-century middle-class perception of the working-class use of alcohol as a moral vice, Esther's drinking, for example, is presented as a result of her social and moral degradation and as an escape from the grim reality of her life.

It is, however, the representations of working-class opium use in *Mary Barton* which more clearly define class boundaries. Unlike tea, the consumption of which connoted common English culture and respectability regardless of class, the use of opium had more complex connotations in nineteenth-century England. Opium, unlike tea, retained its dubious implications despite its normative use as a medicine for it was also used as a recreational drug, in which purpose it was often connected with the working class. In *Mary Barton* it is nevertheless used as food substitute and the need to consume a substance other than food to alleviate hunger accentuates the economic and

social powerlessness of the working-class characters and consequently their cultural and social otherness. Gaskell's fiction does not associate opium with the exotic and sinister Orient nor is opium smoked in opium dens, which is the way late-Victorian fiction often represented opium use. Albeit partly sensationalised, after all its use leads to unpredictable behaviour and even a murder, the use of opium is somehow domesticated; it is a drug which threatens social rather than national boundaries. What becomes clear, though, is that the use of both alcohol and opium by the working-class characters is a matter of economics more than failed morals, or enjoyment.

Another overlooked subject in Victorian food studies that this work addresses is food as gifts and the way they negotiate power relations and construct and reconstruct social and cultural boundaries. In *North and South*, fruit define Margaret Hale's relationship with both her suitors and her identity as a sexual being. When put into a basket and given as a gift they are transformed from edible commodities into social and cultural signifiers which reconstruct identities and redefine social and cultural identities; they express Mr Thornton's feelings but also articulate legitimate taste which reconstructs his identity in the eyes of the Hales. On the other hand, in *Cranford*, gifts of food are more conventionally used as elements of hospitality and even philanthropy as well as an expression of gratitude and sympathy. In Gaskell's texts, gifts of food define the identities of both the donors and the recipients and express social and economic status and power relations.

The significance of the present study to both Victorian (food) studies and especially to Gaskell studies can be found in the fact that there are no previous studies which would systematically discuss the representations of hunger and consumption in Gaskell's texts. If they have been discussed, it has been through female characters and through gender expectations. Nevertheless, expanding horizons has revealed that class

and culture are even more important factors in how hunger and consumption define and construct identities in these texts. Further, careful reading of the representations of hunger in Gaskell's industrial novels reveals not only a narrative indebtedness to the conventions of humanitarian narrative but also rather surprisingly the use of hunger as a tool in economic power politics. On the other hand, analysing hunger and consumption in *Sylvia's Lovers*, which has never really attracted large critical interest, provides a way to critically read the novel which does not concentrate on its genre as a historical novel. The way social images and identities are constructed through consumption in *Wives and Daughters* has not really been addressed previously yet food and meals play a crucial role in the actions of most of the characters and especially those of the main female character.

Regardless of class or gender, food and meals are used to define and control the boundaries of social and economic groups as well as the hierarchies within these groups; they construct and reconstruct social images and identities. The representations of hunger and consumption in Gaskell's texts articulate culture, class, gender, and nation; they convey meanings of inclusion and exclusion, social and/or economic power or the lack of them, gender differences, patriotic feelings or feelings of displeasure and rebellion, sympathy, and social and cultural positions.

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